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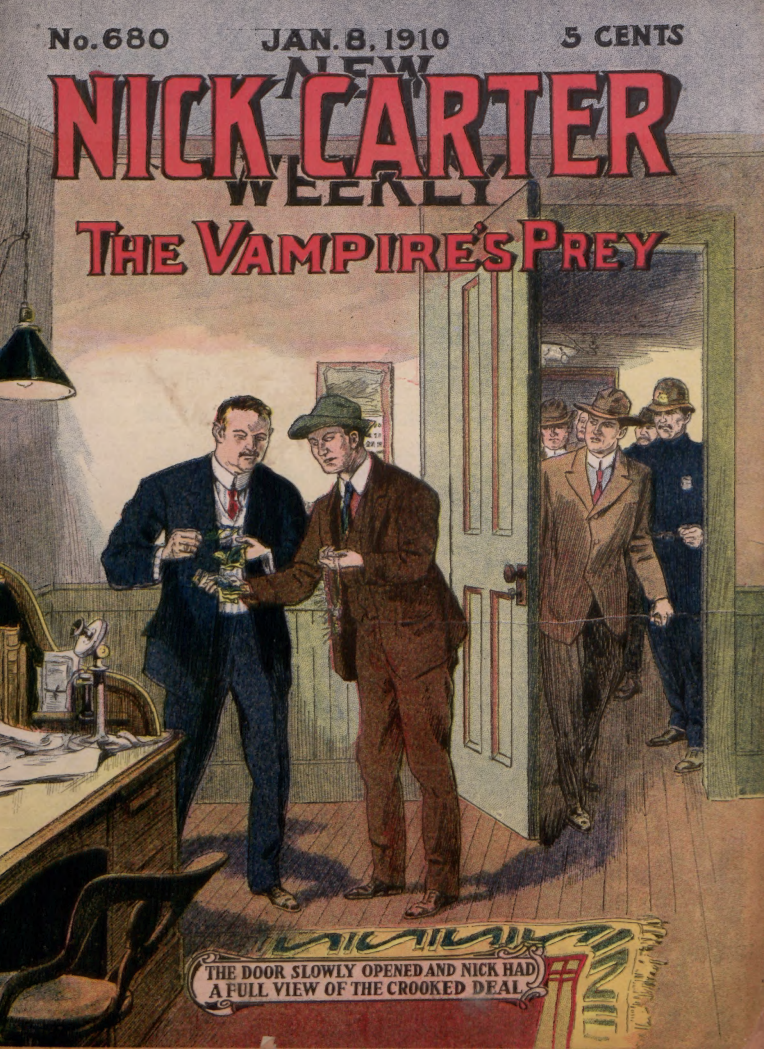
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE VAMPIRE'S PREY



THE DOOR SLOWLY OPENED AND NICK HAD A FULL VIEW OF THE CROOKED DEAL

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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The Vampire's Prey;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S BLOW AT POLICY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN ASSAULT AND TWO ROBBERIES.

"What do you think of this? The famous Ridler necklace is stolen!"

It was Chickering Carter, first assistant of the renowned detective, who spoke. He, with the chief, and the other members of the great investigator's household, were assembled in the breakfast room. Chick had just looked up from the morning newspaper.

"Oh!" cried Adelina, the beautiful wife of Patsy Garvan, one of Nick's most valued aids. "You don't mean that glorious diamond necklace that Mrs. Johnstone Ridler wore at the Horse Show?"

"The same. And it certainly *is* a glorious collection of stones. I doubt if there are purer, or larger, stones in any similar ornament here or in Europe," declared Chick.

"Mr. Johnstone Ridler, Senior, had a hand in their selection," said Adelina, who knew all about the famous jewels of New York's so-called four hundred. "The necklace is worth a fortune."

"Forty thousand dollars," Nick himself remarked.

"How was it lost?" queried Patsy, unfolding his own newspaper.

"Seems to be a mystery," said Chickering. "Disappeared yesterday morning—in broad daylight. Mrs. Ridler wore it to the Innesses' ball the night before; it had not been put away in the jewel safe, but was left in her dressing room. Mrs. Ridler went driving yesterday morning, and when she returned, about luncheon time, it was discovered that the necklace had disappeared. There were other jewels with it, but they were not taken. Looks a little odd——"

"Hello!" ejaculated Patsy, breaking in on Chick's story. "This is too bad! Poor old Jerry Mellen! The guy that did that——"

"Now, Patsy, what is wrong?" asked Nick Carter.

"Why, an old college chum of mine—old Jerry Mellen—who's lived since the year one down in East Fourth Street, was assaulted and robbed yesterday. Gee! What good are these cops, anyway? Right in broad daylight."

"Patsy is more interested in his Jerry Mellen than in Mrs. Ridler's jewels," said Adelina, laughing.

"I certainly am!" exclaimed her husband. "There are plenty of diamonds in the world; but there never will be but one Uncle Jerry Mellen."

"Who is he?" inquired Nick.

"In the first place," said Patsy, with twinkling eyes, "he comes of one of the first families in Ireland. Jerry's been over here for half a century and more, and he's had his surgical clinic right in that same room on Fourth Street for forty years, if he has a day."

"He's a doctor, then?" exclaimed Chick.

"The very finest kind. He's a doll surgeon," said Patsy, getting a lot of amusement out of Chick's surprise at the statement. "He can mend any kind of a break in any kind of a doll. Talk of vivisection! Why

he has often taken a head from one doll and put it on another, transferred limbs, and eyes, and hair, as well. He is a wonder!"

"So are you," grunted Chick, when the others had ceased laughing. "But this lost diamond necklace is a very mysterious affair."

"So is this attack on old Uncle Jerry," declared Patsy, letting his eyes fall on the account in his paper again. "It's a mean shame, too! They don't know who the scamp was who did it. Think of anybody around Fourth Street doing such a thing to the old man!"

"Was he seriously hurt?" asked Adelina, wavering in her interest between Patsy's old friend and Mrs. Ridler's diamonds.

"Bad enough. The scoundrel that did it walks into Uncle Jerry's door somewhere about noontime, so the paper says, and struck the old man from behind with a blackjack. He was knocked unconscious. Then the fellow robbed him of his little savings that were in a broken teapot on the shelf, and took away with him, too, a broken doll that had been left with Uncle Jerry to be mended. The poor old man is making a holler about the doll as loud as over the money he lost. It was a French doll that one of his uptown customers had just left with him, and he says he never lost a patient, or disappointed a customer before."

"Isn't it a shame!" cried Adelina. "Did he have many customers among wealthy people, Patsy?"

"Slathers of 'em. Some families have had him for three generations. You'll often see the finest carriages, and bang-up automobiles, in front of his door. I bet there's many a kid in a Fifth Avenue nursery that hears of this trouble of the old man's will be worried for fear it was her doll the scoundrel swiped from Uncle Jerry."

Nick set down his coffee cup, squared around in his chair, and took an increased interest in the subject.

"Patsy," he said, "anything more about that assault on the old doll surgeon?"

"Yes, sir. The doctor had to be called to sew up the wound in Uncle Jerry's head. He's in bed now."

"But the money he lost—and the doll?" queried Nick.

"From what I know of Uncle Jerry, I rather think that the 'hoarded savings' in the broken teapot are mostly a flight of reportorial imagination. He probably kept his beer money, and small change, handy by him; but he is a shrewd old Irishman, and has got enough money put away in some bank to bury him when the time comes. You can bet on that," said Patsy.

"And the doll?"

"The paper said it was a fine French doll that a customer had just left with him. Perhaps that drew the thief. Perhaps he could hock it for half a dollar. He was small potatoes, anyway, that yegg!" grunted Patsy.

"Of course, the account doesn't state who is the owner of the doll?" suggested Nick carelessly.

"It says a rich little girl came with her mother in a carriage not an hour before Uncle Jerry was assaulted and left the doll. Here! Will you read it yourself?" said Patsy, offering his chief the paper.

"Never mind," said Nick, waving it away, and he turned to Chick, who was deep in his own paper, and showed little interest in Patsy's story. "Did you tell us Mrs. Johnstone Ridler had been driving in the morning before she discovered the necklace had been stolen?"

"What?" said Chick, starting, and staring at Nick, while the others neglected their breakfasts, too, in their surprise.

Nick repeated his question.

"Yes. She went driving with her little girl and her maid," Chick said. "But what has that to do——?"

"And they returned before luncheon, when it was discovered the necklace was gone from the dressing room?"

"Yes."

Nick waited a moment, while the others stared at him wonderingly. Then he began to laugh when he noticed their faces.

"Gee, chief!" exclaimed Patsy, "what's working in your brain? You going to couple up the loss of the Ridler necklace with Uncle Jerry Mellen getting cracked on the coco?"

"Don't you think it can be done?" asked Nick, still smiling.

"I don't see why you should suspect such a coupling," declared Patsy.

"You're puzzled, are you, Patsy?" asked Nick.

"I think I am."

"And so am I, Nick," said Adelina.

"Me, too!" put in Chick.

Nick beckoned to Joseph, his confidential man, and whispered something into that attentive servant's ear, and sent him out of the room.

"Wait a moment," said Nick. "Let us see if my suspicion has any foundation in fact. Continue your breakfasts, friends."

But the others were too much interested and curious to more than toy with their food until Joseph reappeared, which was after the lapse of fifteen minutes. Nick at once asked the old man:

"Did you call the Ridlers' number, Joseph?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whom did you get on the wire?"

"The butler, sir."

"And could he give you the information I desired, Joseph?"

"He got it from the lady's maid, sir."

"Repeat what he said to you, Joseph," said Nick, still smiling and looking from one to the other of his associates about the breakfast table.

"He said, sir, that his mistress called the carriage yesterday morning particularly to go downtown to a place where they mended dolls. Her little girl had broken her doll, and was crying to have it mended, and

Mrs. Ridler took her, and the doll, to the doll hospital."

"The hospital carried on by a man named Mellen, on Fourth Street, between First and Second Avenues?" asked Nick, broadly a-smile.

"Yes, sir. And the doll was left there to be repaired by the doll surgeon," said Joseph.

"That is all, Joseph. Thank you," said Nick, breaking into a laugh at the expression of his companions' faces.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOLL SURGEON.

As soon as breakfast was over, young Garvan started for Fourth Street, which is on the East Side, in the heart of "Little Germany." Although German is spoken more than English in the neighborhood, there are many "old settlers" of other nationalities. The lower east side of Manhattan Island was first densely populated by the Irish, and fragments of that race are found in every neighborhood, from Cherry Hill to the gas house district.

As Patsy had told his friends that morning at the breakfast table, old Jerry Mellen had been forty years in the one brick tenement house on the south side of the street, and his wee sign—"Doll Surgeon"—hung in the front window of the flat, attracted more than passing attention from strangers in the neighborhood, but was considered quite ordinary by those who were used to it, and to the old man himself.

Several children were hanging about the doorway of the tenement house when Patsy came to it. The immediate furor of the assault, it now being twenty-four hours old, was past, and the neighborhood was quiet; but the children evidently missed the kindly face of the old surgeon at his window, in which were still displayed arms and legs of wonderful plumpness, the rosiest of rosy china and waxen faces, and wonderful heads of hair of all hues.

One little girl sat on the lowest step of the doorstoop and rocked a dilapidated doll in her arms. One leg hung by a thread from the knee, and was utterly crushed at the foot—the evident victim of a "run-over" accident. Her face was tear-stained, and when Patsy chucked her under the chin and asked the reason of her woe, she lisped:

"My dolly's doctor is hurted and can't 'tend her none at all. And just see how bad her leg is. I just cried at the doctor's door how bad her leg was, but the woman drove me out, I know my dolly's doctor would fix her if he knew."

"Of course he would," declared Patsy. "And he will, yet. You nurse her up the best you can till Uncle Jerry gets well himself. I guarantee he'll make her as good as new."

"Are you sure so?" demanded the small but anxious mother.

"Quite. I'm going in to see him now, and I'll speak to him about your doll."

Jerry Mellen had no soul in the world that belonged to him; but some of the neighboring women had agreed to take turns in the nursing of the old man. Patsy found one of these in the kitchen of the little flat clearing up some of the litter that had accumulated from Uncle Jerry's bachelor housekeeping.

"Suah, dot vooman vot gomes in py Misder Mellun to glean for him iss a dir-r-rty voomans—I always said so. Id a plessing is, mebbe, dot Misder Mellun dakes to his ped yet; ve get him glean alretty."

"I'll see what Uncle Jerry says about it," returned Patsy, laughing. "If he's laid up for long I know he'll think himself bound for the poorhouse. Is he awake?"

"Come in, whoever you are—in Heaven's name!" exclaimed a querulous voice from the bedroom. "I'm dyin' fer th' sound of a voice talkin' good English."

"Hello, Jerry, old man!" declared Patsy, laughing as he entered the bedroom.

"It's little Patsy Garvan!" exclaimed the doll surgeon, weakly stretching forth a hand. "How are ye doin', bye?"

"Fine. But you are not doing so well, I hear," returned Patsy.

"Ah, now! I wouldn't have been tumbled over by the ruffian if he'd not taken me at the back," declared Jerry. "There's a bit of fight left in me yet."

"Tell me about it," urged Nick Carter's young assistant. "What have the police done?"

"Phat they usually do," said Jerry, in disgust.

"And what is that?"

"Snoop around a man's house and tell him they don't believe he was robbed at all. That's what an ugly mug from police headquarters—or so he said he was—hinted at. I axed him did he think I struck meself over the head with a billy, an' cracked me own skull, and thin robbed meself?"

"Well, let the police go, Jerry. They haven't found any trace of the fellow who clouted you, I understand?"

"Nor they won't."

"Well, that's as may be. Perhaps I can be smarter than they. Give me the facts."

"Is it detective work you're doin' now, Patsy?" asked the old man.

"Something like that," said Patsy.

"So I was hearin'. But I was not believin' it," said Mellen, wagging his head on the pillow. "I know well the rapscallion of a lad you was, but I really thought ye'd reformed, so I did!"

Patsy laughed. Truly the old man was in a state of great disgust. The detectives who had been put on the case had not managed to dig up an atom of evidence that was not already known to everybody with common sense. The person who had robbed Uncle Jerry had forced the lock of his kitchen door—an easy matter, for both door and lock were old—had tiptoed through the rooms, and without warning had struck

the doll surgeon down. Perhaps the old man was growing hard of hearing, and therefore had not heard a sound before the blow was struck. And it looked as though the deed must have been done by somebody who knew Uncle Jerry and his house and his habits well!

"He avin knew where I kep' me bit of money in the ould broken teapot," said Jerry. "It's some dir-r-rty spalpane, mayhap, that I've given a bite and sup to some time. Oh, wurra! wurra! the world is full of mane folks, Patsy Garvan!"

"And good folks," added Patsy dryly. "Variety is the spice of life. What are you kicking about? You've lived forty years in this ranch and nobody ever knocked you in the head before. Ain't that so?"

Uncle Jerry blinked a bit at this philosophy, and before he could find his breath for an answer, Patsy went on:

"And they say he swiped one of your patients. How do you know it wasn't an elopement?"

"Arrah, go on wid yer!" gasped the old man. "Stop yer foolin'. An' do yez call yerself a detective?"

"No. I'm just learning to be one. But tell me honest, Uncle Jerry, why d'ye suppose the guy took the doll?"

"'Twas a foine wan. It cost a mint of money in Paree, belike."

"So you think he took it to sell again?"

"Why not?" said Jerry, his eyes snapping. "Would a burglar be huntin' for a doll-baby to play wid?"

"Some of 'em are tender hearted," said Patsy, grinning. "But it seems to me a doll would be an awkward thing to dispose of—and a broken doll at that."

"Sure, 'twas a simple dislocation," declared Uncle Jerry, more mildly. "The ligimints holdin' the right ar-rm to the shoulder had been pulled out, and there was a big gap there. The arm was hingin' to it, so the spalpane got the whole doll. Anybody could stitch it together and make it as good as new. But the little girl—sure, she belaved nobody could make it well but Uncle Jerry," and the old man cackled out his thin laugh, and his blue eyes sparkled with fun.

"She'll be sorry to lose her doll," said Patsy.

"And I'm sorrier," grunted the doll surgeon, growing suddenly serious again. "How do I knbw but her folks will want me to pay for it—and it cost a pretty penny."

"Who are they?"

"It's Mrs. Ridler. Sure, she's a foine woman altogether—and I knew her when she was a slip of a gur-rl and used to bring me her own dolls to mend," declared Uncle Jerry.

Patsy was prepared for this statement—he really was. Nevertheless, it puzzled him. Why had the person who had attacked and robbed Uncle Jerry picked out the Ridler girl's doll to steal, too? And on the very day that Mrs. Ridler's forty-thousand-dollar necklace was stolen!

"Let me take a look about your shop, Jerry?" said the young detective.

"Help yersilf! I s'pose it's lookin' for a clue ye be? Well, it's a fierce lot o' clues ye'll found among that litter!"

Patsy went into the rather gloomy room where the old man had worked for so many years. Bench, shelves, chairs—even the floor itself in spots—were heaped with dolls, and their various parts, and tools, and shavings, boxes of glass eyes, other boxes of broken toys of all kinds, Noah's Ark figures, wooden and leaden soldiers, and all manner of such things.

There was not, as far as Patsy could see, any doll in sight that looked to be valuable enough to steal. The person who had assaulted and robbed Uncle Jerry had evidently taken the only "patient" in the hospital that could be turned into cash.

The neighboring housewives who had undertaken the nursing of Uncle Jerry, and the tidying up of his little home, had not come as far as the shop yet with broom and duster. Everything here was as he had left it. There was even a dark stain on the old rug by his work bench where the blood from the wound in his head had soaked into the fabric.

The neighbors had merely lifted him from the floor to the bed, sent for the doctor to mend him, and left his shop as it was. The police had not disturbed the place much, that was sure. At hand, on the little bench, were the tools Uncle Jerry had been using, and parts of a china doll that evidently had been roughly treated.

Who could have come into the place and deliberately knocked out the inoffensive old man? It would certainly have taken a cold-blooded scoundrel to do this—and for the bit of money Uncle Jerry might have had about him, and a mechanical doll?

"I'll get this guy, if I can, and send him to the Island," was Patsy's unspoken thought. "Like enough he's some fellow living in the neighborhood—perhaps in this very house. I'll spot him—— Hello!"

He stooped to pick up a slip of soiled paper that lay on the floor under the work bench. There was a column of figures, written in rather a good hand, upon the slip, and when Patsy examined it closely he saw that the writing had been mimeographed. Several similar slips had been copied from an original impression made upon the gelatine pan.

Patsy studied this slip of paper thoughtfully. There wasn't much of anything going on in New York that Patsy Garvan wasn't "wise" to! He knew the seamy side of city life, without being of it; he kept himself clean personally, as Nick had taught him—and he had Adelina to help him, too. But Patsy didn't need an introduction to the meaning of this slip of paper.

He wandered back into the bedroom with the paper in his hand. Uncle Jerry was dozing on his pillow, but his blue eyes opened when Patsy said:

"I say, old man, how long since you took to playing policy, eh? You're getting to be a regular sport."

"Policy, is ut!" exclaimed the old man, with sudden vigor, and a flush coming into his withered cheeks. "What would I be such a fool for as to risk me hard-

earned money gambling in a game that ye've no chancet at all ter win in! Sure, how many times have I warned you, yerself, Patsy Garvan, from that same sin—the sin of gambling?

"If I had me way," continued Uncle Jerry excitedly, his eyes flashing now in his wrath, "I'd wipe policy off the map! It's the curse of the tinimints! The rich, mebbe, kin afford to gamble; though I don't belave it. But the poor can scarce make their bread these times, without bein' timpted by such games as policy to waste their little bit of coin.

"I was at Joe McNally about it only the other day. Joe never has a cent, or a steady job, and he's getting so he don't draw many real sober breaths. And what is ut that's the matter with him? His father was a dacent lad; his grandfather came over in the ship with me, and wor-rked har-rd all his life. Joe thinks he can live without workin'—'tis a belafe many of these young felleys seem to have nowadays. Joe thinks he's going to hit it right in policy some day. Yah! It's his mother is the har-rd-workin' woman, and is foolish enough to give him the coin to play the game wid! But what's that ye have in yer hand, Patsy?" demanded the old man suddenly.

"It looks to me like a policy drawing—they're 'gigs', anyway. I just picked them up in your shop, Uncle Jerry. It looks bad," added Patsy, grinning.

"A curse on them!" exclaimed the old man. "And on them that runs the game that is ruinin' many a poor man's home. And to think! I knew Denny Haloran as well as I do you, Patsy—and he was no worse as a boy than you were. I don't know what ind you may come to, Patsy, but you can never have as black a career—or have as much to answer for—no matter what you do, as Denny Haloran."

"You mean Haloran, the policy man—him they call the Policy King?" asked Patsy thoughtfully.

"The same. 'The King of Policy'—sure, he ought to have horns and a tail to him! He's rollin' in goold, so they say, and it's goold made by quarters, and half dollars, from the foolish poor. It's such byes as Joe McNally that supports Denny in his foine house, and puts foine clo'es on his back, an' di'monds on his hands an' in his fine linen shirt——an' his father niver had aught but a flannel shirt to his back, and not too many av them!"

Patsy had heard the old man, in the past, rail against what he ever called the "crying sin of the tenements." He interrupted him now with this question:

"Does Joe McNally often come in here, Uncle Jerry?"

"He niver comes in here! I wouldn't let the likes of him darken me dure—not I! Joe has an aunt livin' on the top flure of this very house, Patsy, and he's in and out to see her. I have me suspicions that he timpts the poor, foolish woman, to spend some of her husband's money in playin' this divil's game Joe is so in love wid. But I give it to Joe straight the other night on the steps beyant. I tould him what I thought av him, and what he was comin' to. Policy! Huh!"

and Uncle Jerry fell back in his bed actually exhausted.

Patsy slowly folded the slip on which were written the policy drawings and slipped it into his pocket. Then he left the wounded doll surgeon to his refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSING NECKLACE.

"Mr. Johnstone Ridler," announced Joseph to Nicholas Carter, and withdrew.

The detective had Johnstone Ridler's card before him on the big work table at which he sat. He had turned the shade of the drop light just enough for its rays to strike the gentleman's face as he advanced to the chair set for him—and for any other visitor—at the end of the table.

It was in Nick's big office, the time was after dinner of the day on which the foregoing incidents occurred, and Johnstone Ridler's call was unexpected by the detective.

"Mr. Carter," said the gentleman, coming to the point at once, "I have come to see you just because of one thing. You are a detective, I understand. You, of course, know that my wife has lost her diamond necklace. The news is more than twenty-four hours old now, and every police officer and detective in the city knows about it. Forty thousand dollars—or its value in gems—are not lost every day.

"The police are at work on the case. I even have had the advice of the head of a well known bureau of private investigators—private detectives. All is being done that can be done—so I tell my wife—to find the jewels and the very shrewd person who stole them. I do not believe that you can help me, Mr. Carter, and I have not come to engage you in the quest.

"But," said this very frank-spoken man, smiling as he looked again at the calm detective, "I have come here out of a certain curiosity. You were not consulted in this necklace case. I do not know that you have any information regarding it save what may have been in the newspapers. Yet you showed, I find, a decided interest in it. I am curious to know why you telephoned to my house this morning and asked my butler the question you did. In another man I would consider it an impertinence; indeed, I did so consider it at first, when my butler mentioned the fact to me. But later my curiosity got the better of my momentary vexation, and—well, you see me here for the one purpose of asking you to explain," added Mr. Ridler, and rather grimly.

Nick had shown no emotion in his face as he listened to the visitor, and he only said:

"You came here to ask me this out of mere curiosity?"

"I did, sir."

"And I asked your butler the question I did—or, rather, I had my man ask him the question—for the same reason."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Ridler, flushing.

"Mere curiosity," said Nick quietly.

Mr. Ridler half rose from his chair, and his eyes sparkled. He was a small man, but dignified in appearance, and evidently one who was used to the respect, not to say deference, of those with whom he came in contact.

"Mr. Carter! your levity surprises me," he said, sitting down again when he saw how calm the detective remained. "I have come here on a serious matter——"

"Ah! Then something beside mere curiosity may be behind your call this evening, Mr. Ridler?" returned Nick, helping himself to a cigar and pushing the box toward his visitor.

Mr. Ridler ignored the cigars. "The loss of a forty-thousand-dollar necklace can be considered a serious matter—even to you, sir?" he said.

"Quite so," admitted Nick, lighting up.

"You asked my butler a very strange question, Mr. Carter," blurted out Ridler. "I want it explained."

"Of course, sir, you understand that I am not bound to make that explanation?" said Nick mildly. "As you say so truthfully, I have nothing at all to do with this case. It is no concern of mine."

"But you asked the butler where my wife had gone to drive yesterday morning!" exclaimed Ridler, in increasing excitement.

"I believe that was the query I instructed Joseph to put to your man," admitted Nick.

"Well, confound it all!" cried the exasperated visitor, rising again, "what did you mean by it? I want to know what you know about this mysterious affair. I don't take any stock in all this stuff in the newspapers——"

"I have not seen the newspapers," interposed Nick.

"Why, some smart reporter this afternoon coupled the loss of my wife's necklace with something that happened to a poor old man downtown who was robbed yesterday, too—the man whose little shop my wife drove to. This penny-a-liner calls my wife's beautiful string of diamonds that my father selected himself and had made up for her, 'a hoodoo necklace.' He has garbled a lot of our private family history—Heaven only knows how these newspapers learn such things!—to make it appear that ever since the necklace was made it has brought bad luck to our family. Bah!

"It is true that my poor father died soon after our marriage; Mrs. Ridler did have a very serious accident—she was thrown from her horse in nineteen hundred and three; I did lose a good bit of money in Union and Pacific, but so did other people. We were unfortunate enough, two summers ago, to have a newly engaged domestic bring smallpox into our summer home at Sound Beach.

"All these things are facts, but to state that the necklace is cursed and that its owner, or wearer, brings misfortune—'bad luck' that idiotic writer called it—to whomever she comes in contact with, is a disgraceful statement that I hope my wife will not see. It would hurt her feelings very much, Mr. Carter."

"So I can understand," was Nick's comment.

"As for the old man—old Jerry Mellen—being robbed yesterday, what had that to do with the loss of a forty-thousand-dollar necklace?" demanded Mr. Ridler. "I'm sorry for the old man; but I am a good deal sorrier for ourselves—for my wife especially."

"So I should presume," was the detective's remark.

"But you must have had some reason for asking the question you did, Mr. Carter," said Ridler. "You must have, in your mind, connected Mrs. Ridler's necklace and old Mellen——"

"Not at all!" Nick hastened to say.

"But the two robberies——?"

"That is another matter," said the detective.

"You do see a connection between them?" gasped Ridler, falling back in his chair.

"What do the police say about such a possibility?" asked Nick, smiling.

Ridler flushed and hesitated. Finally he blurted out: "They practically called me a fool!"

"Indeed!"

"I was puzzled by the circumstance of your asking the question of the butler. I went down to the detective bureau and saw the official who has the loss of the necklace in charge."

"Yes?"

"And he advised me to let the matter alone. He said his men had found out that Mellen's trouble was mostly neighborhood gossip. The old man had been knocked over the head, but evidently by somebody who wanted to get square with him because of his caustic tongue. It seems he has many enemies in the neighborhood."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Nick, a little smile quivering about the corners of his mouth. "And what does your private detective say?"

"He takes no stock in any connection between the two incidents, Mr. Carter. He would not even discuss it with me. He has examined everybody in my house, searched the servants' rooms and possessions, and placed them all under more or less surveillance. Indeed, my wife is almost as much troubled over the peril of losing the entire force of domestics, as she is over the fact that the necklace is gone. For, of course, all the domestics are not to be considered as having had to do with the loss of the gems, and the detective has succeeded in putting them all on the verge of leaving our employ."

Nick nodded, smiling quietly. Ridler watched him with an embarrassed air, but as Nick said nothing further in comment, he was forced to take the lead again himself.

"I—I would not accuse you of having no more reason for suggesting a possibility—and a serious possibility—than an imaginative writer on a penny paper. I am greatly disturbed over this affair, Mr. Carter. If you chance to know—or suspect—anything regarding this robbery that I do not know, I would consider

it a favor—and one that I am amply able, and willing, to reimburse you for—if you would open your mind to me."

Nick laughed outright at this point. "Mr. Ridler," he said, "would you consider it professional courtesy on my part if I 'butted into' another detective's game?"

"I—I would bind myself not to inform either the police, or the other detective, of my visit to you."

"Then why engage men to act for you in whom you appear to have so little confidence?" asked Nick, with some sharpness, and putting down his cigar. "I do not just understand you, Mr. Ridler. What do you want? What have you come here for?"

The visitor threw up his hands—literally—and exclaimed:

"I do not know. I was advised not to come. I was told that your methods of criminal investigation were most spectacular and that in a case like this—merely an 'inside job'——"

"I recognize the usual jargon there," chuckled Nick, interrupting.

"Eh? Yes, I did repeat what both the headquarters detectives and the man I privately engaged on the case, called it. Both declare that somebody in the house—of course, one of the servants—stole the necklace. They say it is a mere matter of looking up the antecedents of all the domestics, and finally running down the right one, and proving his, or her, guilt. Meanwhile, they must all be so strictly watched that they cannot make way with the necklace—if, indeed, it has not already been passed to some confederate outside, which will make the recovery of it a matter of more delay."

"As you say, working from this hypothesis, between them the police and your private man has stirred up a domestic hornet's nest about your ears?"

"My wife's maid is in continual tears; the housemaids sulk; the butler puts a dish before me at table as though he were feeding a prisoner condemned to the guillotine; I am almost afraid to allow my own valet to shave me; and I expect to develop symptoms of poisoning after eating anything my cook prepares!"

Nick's amusement at this report was vast, and Ridler said querulously:

"It does no good for me to sit here and afford you so much matter for laughter, Mr. Carter. If you cannot help me, why should I tell you these things?"

"Why, sir, this is the first I have understood that you wanted help from me," declared Nick. "You said you came out of sheer curiosity, and you likewise stated that you had both the public officials, and a private detective, at work on the case."

"But, hang it!" sputtered Ridler, "none of them seem to be doing an atom of good. I don't want another man fussing about the house and turning the whole place topsy-turvy—nor does my wife. Let me tell you, the domestic problem is a serious one these days. Mrs. Ridler has managed to build up what we considered an almost perfect household force; and this probing, and cross-examining, and hounding of our serving people may break up our home and send us to join that large number of American families who are obliged to exist in hotels instead of live in their own homes."

"A serious condition faces you, indeed," said Nick gravely, but with twinkling eyes. "And what do you want of me, pray?"

"Can you help me without following the same methods as these idiots from police headquarters, and this other man I speak of?" cried Ridler desperately.

"I do not know."

"But do you think there is no other way to get at the truth?"

"We can try, Mr. Ridler—if you so wish," said Nick quietly.

"How?"

"You are acquainted with all the particulars of the matter of the necklace?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"If you will answer certain questions I will put to you I can, I believe, soon conclude whether I can advise you in the case without examining the premises in person. My attitude is that of advisory investigator, you understand. It is not the first time I have been consulted under similar circumstances. It is sometimes possible for the person unhampered by unnecessary and conflicting details, to see straighter, and quicker, to the goal of truth than those seemingly better informed of the circumstances."

"I appreciate that point," said Ridler, whose manner toward the detective had gradually become rather deferential. "And I am, of course, ready to answer any *proper* question you may put to me."

Nick's eye twinkled as he noted the conditional phrase, but he did not remark upon it. He merely touched a secret button under the table, and in the next room, the door of which was screened by the false partition made to look exactly like the other walls of the office, a hand moved silently on a dial before Patsy Garvan until it indicated, "Take notes." Young Garvan moved quietly to a seat behind the screen with notebook and paper in hand, and tapped another button, which rang a single silvery note on a gong in the hall, but loud enough for Nick to hear. The chief knew that his assistant was ready.

During the few seconds occupied by this, Nick had pushed the cigar box toward his visitor again, and had taken up and lighted his own partly consumed cigar. Mr. Ridler, too, accepted a cigar this time, and when it was drawing satisfactorily, Nick put his first query:

"Where was this necklace usually kept?"

"Locked with other jewels in a compartment of the silver safe in the dining room."

"Fireproof?"

"And burglar proof. We put the stuff in a safety deposit vault, of course, when we leave our town house. But a bunch of burglars had an all-night seance at that dining room safe once, and with no effect."

Nick merely nodded and said:

"The necklace was worn by your wife night before last?"

"At the ball given by Mr. Jacob Inness."

"At what hour did she return from the ball?"

"I brought her back at a quarter to four yesterday morning. I went with her to her dressing room, and saw that her maid was awakened to assist her. Then I went to bed."

"The necklace was in your wife's possession when you left her with the maid?"

"It was. I saw it on Mrs. Ridler's neck when I kissed her good night," declared Ridler.

"Did you see the necklace again?"

"I did not."

"Who did?"

"Both my wife and the maid."

"You mean at the time she came home with it on?"

"And in the morning, too—after my wife had arisen."

"I can understand why the necklace was not returned to the safe when you came home from the ball," said Nick. "But why was it not put away later?"

"Carelessness," said Ridler promptly. "Carelessness, bred of a feeling of perfect security. Since we went to housekeeping, Mr. Carter, we have never lost the value of a dollar by thievery of any kind. And I am unable to believe—I swear I am!—that any of the domestics would be guilty of robbing us."

"We're not going into that just now," said Nick. "Where did your wife leave the necklace when she retired?"

"Oh, upon her dressing table, with several rings, a bracelet or two, and some other trinkets."

"And none of the other jewels were touched?"

"I think Mrs. Ridler put on one or two of the rings in the morning, and one of the bracelets. The other things were allowed to remain where they were. She and the maid went out driving in a hurry, I believe."

"Why?" asked Nick quickly.

"Oh—well——. Why, it was because of Nealie, I believe," said Ridler, rather flustered for the moment.

"And who is Nealie?"

"Our little girl. Her name is Eleanor, but she calls herself 'Nealie,' and we have all fallen in the habit of doing the same," explained the gentleman.

"What was the matter with Nealie?" pursued Nick.

"She is a spoiled child—to an extent—I am afraid," said her father excusingly. "She broke her doll, and nothing would do but it must at once be taken to old Mellen's to be 'cured.'"

"She believes in the doll surgeon, does she?" commented Nick, with a smile. "So that was the reason Mrs. Ridler went driving yesterday morning?"

"I believe it was the sole reason. She had to get out of bed and wait on that child! I tell you, Nealie is being spoiled."

"Yes? So the child and her mother—and the maid, did you say?"

"Yes; the maid, Maria, went with them in the carriage."

"And they left your wife's apartments without thinking to put the necklace away?"

"So I suppose. At least, they did not put it away. My wife is positive she saw it lying on the dressing table when she put on her rings. The maid says the same."

"And Nealie?" asked Nick.

"Oh, she is only four years old. I fear she would not make a good witness," said Mr. Ridler.

"I don't know. Children are pretty observant at that age."

"Nealie was about the room, of course, and in her nursery adjoining. It was her crying there because her doll's arm came off that disturbed Mrs. Ridler yesterday morning."

"The child had the run of the rooms while your wife was dressing, of course?" asked Nick.

"Why—er—yes," said Ridler, and stared at the detective with some surprise.

"Was there anybody else in the rooms before your wife and her maid, with Miss Nealie, went out to drive?"

"There was not."

"And to the best of their remembrance—your wife's and the maid's, I mean, as of course the little girl was not asked——?"

"Of course Nealie wasn't asked about it," said Ridler.

"But to the best of the belief of Mrs. Ridler and the maid, the necklace was still on the dressing room table when the carriage was announced and they went out?"

"That is correct."

"Did either your wife or the maid state that she positively saw the necklace lying there at the time they left the room?"

"No-o. I believe not. Indeed, I am sure if my wife had noted it at that time, she would have thought to put the jewels away."

"Quite so. And the maid—Maria what?"

"Maria Deculto. We have had her four years and more."

"Ah! You were in Italy on your honeymoon, Mr. Ridler," said Nick. "Your wife brought the maid from her own country?"

"Yes," said Ridler, though looking a bit surprised that Nick should be aware of this intimate fact.

"Has she any followers?"

"Maria? Oh, no!" said Ridler, with emphasis.

"You seem positive, Mr. Ridler."

"Surely. She is too homely. She is perhaps the plainest woman that ever I saw in service, without having any actual facial deformity. She is somewhere about thirty years of age, very quiet, seldom goes out, is not popular with the other servants, keeps much to herself."

"How did your wife come to engage her?"

"The maid we took to Europe with us became homesick, and we had to send her back to America. My wife suffered under the hands of various hotel maids until we came to Naples. There this Maria waited in

the hotel. She was perfect. Mrs. Ridler engaged her."

"Know anything about her family or friends?"

"No. But, Mr. Carter, you are, I firmly believe, turning your suspicions on the wrong person," said Ridler. "Maria went out with my wife; surely she would not have taken the necklace with her. And had she done so she would have had no opportunity during the drive to have disposed of it. When they returned Mrs. Ridler and the maid, and Nealie, went at once to my wife's rooms, and the loss of the necklace was discovered."

"By whom?"

"Mrs. Ridler."

"And then?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Carter?" asked the gentleman, looking puzzled.

"Tell me what occurred when Mrs. Ridler discovered the necklace was no longer on her dressing table?"

"She asked Maria if she had moved it before they went out. Maria said she had not. The other jewels lying there intact made the idea of robbery seem preposterous at first. But when my wife sent for the servants who would have any business in that part of the house, and asked them, one after another, if they had meddled with the necklace, and they all denied even having been in the rooms during the time Mrs. Ridler was absent on her drive, the matter assumed an appearance that made her telephone for me to come home at once."

"I see. And the maid?"

"Maria? You are still insistent upon that point, are you?" asked Ridler, with some scorn. "And so are the police and the other detective. I do not see that you are getting anything more out of it than they have, Mr. Carter."

"You do not know yet what I am getting out of it," returned Nick. "Tell me how the maid acted."

"Like a foolish woman, of course. She seemed to think that suspicion must fall upon her at once. Mind you, she had not been out of Mrs. Ridler's sight all the morning. Yet she insisted on being searched—searched to the very skin!—by my wife, there and then."

"Just as soon as the necklace was missed?"

"No. Just as soon as it was established that it must have been stolen," declared Ridler. "There is a difference there, Mr. Carter. The guilty person might have made the demand at once, being eager to clear herself by such a search. Maria grew more and more excited as the other servants were questioned, and finally hysterically demanded that she be searched. My wife had to do so to pacify her."

"I see."

"It is ridiculous to suggest that Maria stole the necklace," declared Ridler bluntly.

"Indeed?"

"Why, she was not out of Mrs. Ridler's sight——"

"In the house?"

"Exactly."

"Nor during the drive?"

"Of course not!"

"At the doll surgeon's shop who went into the house with the doll?"

"Mrs. Ridler and Nealie."

"Then Maria was left alone in the carriage?" queried Nick, smiling.

"No. The coachman, Jerome, was on the seat."

"Of course."

"And you may be sure Jerome and Maria are not in cahoots, Mr. Carter," said Ridler, laughing. "They hate each other. Old Jerome doesn't like 'dagoes,' as he calls the Italians. He was my father's coachman. Jerome is honest, Mr. Carter."

"Your emphasis on that point puts it beyond cavil," said the detective, nodding his head, and remained thoughtfully silent for a minute or so. Mr. Ridler finally grew impatient, and asked:

"What do you think of it, Mr. Carter? Can you give any opinion at all? Do you, like these other officers, believe it was 'an inside job'?"

"From the information you have given me, Mr. Ridler, I am convinced that it was an inside job. Somebody in the house removed the necklace from your wife's dressing room."

"Oh, pshaw, yes! That's admitted. But was it a servant?"

"No," returned Nick positively.

"Indeed! Then you have a new theory?"

"I do not deal in theories—sometimes in convictions. This conviction is established by the evidence I have gained by my questioning of you, Mr. Ridler—and from information from another source."

"What is it? What do you mean?" cried Ridler eagerly. "I thought your question to my butler must be prompted by some inside information."

"Not exactly. But we were speaking of the 'inside' character of the robbery."

"Yes!" exclaimed Ridler. "And if you do not believe one of the servants is guilty, and yet say that somebody in the house took the necklace—— Why, Mr. Carter, come to look at it, your suggestion is a startling one."

"It may be."

"Somebody in my family is—is guilty of this atrocious thing?" cried Ridler, his temperature rising as he contemplated the idea.

"I am afraid I must say 'Yes' to that question," said Nick, bowing, his face serious.

"My family, sir, consists of my wife and child, and my mother. You—you are casting an insinuation upon——"

"Somebody whom, I believe, had the opportunity of removing the necklace just prior to the time Mrs. Ridler, the maid, and the child, left your wife's suite to go down to the carriage."

"Oh—ah—then that eliminates one of my family, at least," said Ridler grimly. "My mother, who is not well, was not out of her bed at that hour yesterday

forenoon. I am sure she can prove an alibi, Mr. Carter," added the man scornfully.

Nick remained quite unruffled. He said nothing more, but his visitor could not let the matter stand there.

"What do you mean?" he blurted out fiercely. "You say you exonerate the servants from taking the diamond necklace. My mother is certainly out of it, and I was downtown at that hour. You leave me to accept the enormous suspicion you suggest—the horrible suspicion that my wife has robbed herself!

"You villain, you!" exclaimed Ridler, springing to his feet and leaning toward the placid Nick, his fists clinched, and his face showing rage and indignation. "You are maligning—slandering—one of the best, one of the purest women who ever stepped! You would try to throw the suspicion of your low police mind upon the hem of her chaste garment! You villain——"

Joseph had entered silently, and stood directly beside Johnstone Ridler. The latter started when he saw the vigorous manservant within hand's touch of him, and he broke off in his vituperation, and slowly sank back in his chair.

"We shall not need you, Joseph. Thank you," said Nick quietly, and the serving man disappeared as noiselessly as he had come.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT NEALIE DID.

Nick Carter selected a fresh cigar and lighted it before he was ready to say another word. His visitor crouched in his chair and watched him with an expression of countenance that gradually drifted from indignation to amazement.

"Mr. Ridler," said the detective, at last, after the other had squirmed on the hook long enough, "you have quite misunderstood the trend of my questioning. I am far from suggesting that Mrs. Ridler is not all that is perfect in womanhood. You have quite misapprehended my meaning."

"I have!" exclaimed Ridler hoarsely.

"You have."

"But you say one of my family has stolen that necklace."

"Not exactly. I suggested that it was removed by one of your immediate household, and not by a domestic."

"Then you must hold that my wife——"

"Had nothing to do with it."

Ridler stared at him with wide open eyes, and then shook his head angrily. "Am I stupid, Mr. Carter? I must confess——"

"Wait," advised Nick, suddenly sitting forward in his chair and holding his visitor's attention while he spoke quietly and convincingly. "I wish to call your attention to another matter for a moment. As I understand it, Mrs. Ridler and your little girl visited old Uncle Jerry Mellen shortly before his flat was broken into and he himself beaten and robbed.

"Wait! The mere fact that Jerry was robbed, and your wife lost her necklace on the same forenoon, is nothing more than a coincidence. The world is full of such coincidences. But do you know what the unknown marauder at Uncle Jerry's did?"

"Knocked the old man off his stool and stole some small sum of money he had by him. At least, so the papers say. The police give another color to the story, as I have informed you," said Ridler.

"The unknown assaulter of Jerry Mellen did more than that. He stole something else from the doll surgeon's shop."

Ridler looked at the detective curiously, but said nothing.

"He went away with the doll your wife and child had left for Jerry to mend. Did you know that, Mr. Ridler?"

The gentleman looked his surprise before he spoke: "I can't say I knew that. Nealie will be hard to comfort, then, for she thought the world and all of that doll. And it cost a peck of money, I guess. I suppose that is why the scoundrel took it."

"Perhaps."

It may have been the intonation of Nick's voice that made the other look at him again and ask:

"What do you mean? Where's the connection? I see now that you are trying to couple the necklace and Uncle Jerry together——"

"No," interrupted Nick.

"Well, the necklace and this unknown robber, then?"

"No," said Nick again, just as emphatically.

"What then?" cried Ridler. "You've got me guessing. I don't see what—— You mean that the necklace and——"

"The doll," said Nick quietly.

Ridler gazed upon him with a face that, within the next few moments, expressed a dozen different emotions.

"Do you mean——?" he began at last, leaning forward himself in his chair.

Nick put out a hand and stopped him. The detective uttered several short, illuminating sentences which evidently inspired Ridler with the liveliest excitement.

"It doesn't seem possible! I can't believe it!" he stammered, getting out of his chair and walking nervously up and down.

"Put it to the test," said Nick tersely.

"By jove! I will!" declared the visitor. He half turned toward the door, but then stopped and glanced back at Nick. "But, great goodness, Mr. Carter! This isn't going to help us much. The necklace is gone!"

"So it would seem," admitted Nick. "But if you ever expect to recover it, it might be well to know just how it disappeared."

"You are right!" declared Ridler, starting for the door again. But once more he stopped and turned back.

"What—what will I do if she won't tell me?" he asked blankly.

"Spank her!" advised Nick, chuckling, and at that Mr. Ridler really reached the door. But there he said, before actually departing:

"You'll be in for an hour yet, Mr. Carter? I surely will telephone you whatever I learn. And remember—I look to you to pull us out of this mess and to recover the necklace if it is possible to do that. You have convinced me, sir, that you know your business!"

Another man than Nick Carter might have become offended with Johnstone Ridler, and have refused to assist him; but the detective had a wonderful patience with the foibles of humanity and the general weaknesses of his brother man. When Ridler was gone, Nick tapped the bell again, and in a moment the screen at the end of the room rolled back and Patsy stepped into the office with his notebook in hand.

"Great goodness, chief!" ejaculated the assistant, "I came near falling off me stool when you sprang that thing about the doll on him! Gee! It never entered my head."

"You saw through it, did you?" queried Nick, smiling.

"Sure. I can take a hint when a ton of coal falls on me! Old Jerry told me the doll's arm was pulled loose and a rip made in the side. You know, I mentioned it?"

"I bore it in mind, Patsy," said Nick.

"The kid must have been playing with her mother's necklace, and she stuffed it into the hole in the doll. Say! That guy that rapped Jerry over the coco has made a haul that will surprise him, eh?"

"Perhaps," replied Nick.

Patsy stared at his chief, his face showing conflicting emotions. Finally he blurted out:

"Nick, do you really believe that the game is deeper than that?"

"What do you think yourself, Patsy?"

"But, my goodness, chief! That is straining a coincidence——"

"You can't strain a coincidence," laughed Nick. "Half the things that work out right in this world we call 'coincidences.' I reckon I believe pretty strongly in 'foreordination.' They were to be."

"Kismet!"

"Call it Fate if you like."

"But in this case——"

"Don't you see the significance, Patsy?" queried his chief.

"But how would this yegg—whoever he was—get onto the game of the necklace being hidden by the kid in the broken doll? I'm dead sure old Jerry Mellen knows nothing about it."

"At least," chuckled Nick, "we can be sure he didn't arrange to have his own head cracked, eh?"

"And that's right!" ejaculated Patsy. "But who would know the necklace was in the doll-baby?"

"Well, who?" returned the chief.

"The kid herself, of course. She evidently wasn't blabbing about it much, or the whole mystery of the loss of the necklace would have been cleared up before this."

"Quite so, Patsy."

"Not the mother surely," said Patsy, shaking his head. "Ridler got dead sore on you, Nick, for your hint. It was a hint, wasn't it?"

"It was the one other chance left open regarding the loss of the diamonds," admitted Nick seriously. "If he had had reason to be suspicious of his wife he would not have acted as he did. Ridler is no fool. If his wife was queer at all, he would have found it out before her debts grew so pressing that she had to sacrifice a forty-thousand-dollar necklace—you can be sure of that, Patsy!"

"Uh-huh!" grunted the younger man.

"So it remains that the child was playing with the gems, dropped them into the doll, perhaps to play with them again, and then probably forgot all about it."

"But somebody else knew the necklace was inside the doll!" cried Patsy. "Somebody beside the kid was wise to the fact, and this somebody put the yegg that swiped Jerry on the coco onto the game. Ain't that so?"

"It looks to be so."

"Then who the dickens was it?"

"How should we scientifically go about discovering that, Patsy?" asked Nick.

"Eliminate those who couldn't possibly have known anything about it," declared the young man promptly.

"Beginning with the President of the United States? Your inquiry would be extensive, Patsy," chuckled Nick.

"Aw, gee, Nick! Don't guy. I mean we can eliminate any other member of the Ridler family saving the kid—can't we?"

"Truly."

"And the servants—— Well, we got to look at the servants, Nick."

"At a servant, Patsy."

"You suspect the maid?"

"Let us hear the evidence," said Nick, smiling.

"But there isn't any evidence yet!"

"Inductive reasoning is sometimes as good as evidence. Look it over, my boy. If Jerry Mellen had not been assaulted and robbed just after coming into possession of little Nellie Ridler's doll, I would be as

much inclined to suspect one servant in the Ridler household of stealing the necklace as another.

"If the doll surgeon was merely attacked by some ne'er-do-well neighbor—like this Joe McNally, at whom suspicion seems to point—he would never have picked up the doll and carried it away. In the first place, no matter how fine a doll it was, such a fellow would not have realized its value. And, on the other hand, it would have been a bulky thing to carry away under a man's coat, for instance.

"No. Patsy, if the necklace was inside the doll, as I believe—and as we soon shall know for sure—the man who assaulted Jerry Mellen robbed the old man of his change for a blind, but really was after the doll which had been left with Mellen by Mrs. Ridler.

"You have already eliminated the child from the matter; she told nobody about hiding the diamonds. And Mrs. Ridler is likewise out of the question. Who else should know? Ridler probably got pretty close to the facts in the matter," said Nick. "We can take his story as being straight. No other servants were in Mrs. Ridler's rooms yesterday morning previous to the drive. Her maid alone would have had the time and opportunity to touch the necklace, or to see the child playing with it, and observe what little Nealie did with it. The maid is the pivotal point—what's her name?"

"Maria Deculto," said Patsy, referring to his notes.

"Just so. This Maria. She must be reckoned up, my boy. She doubtless saw the child put the diamonds into the doll—or she discovered where the necklace was. In some way she informed her partner in the crime. He broke into Jerry Mellen's place, knocked the old man senseless, and got the necklace. He was wise enough, however, to make it appear like an ordinary cheap robbery, and instead of ripping the doll apart to get at the diamonds, he carried away the doll itself, and Jerry's small change."

"Then it can't be that Joe McNally is the guilty dog!" ejaculated Patsy.

"Perhaps."

"But how would he be connected with this Maria Deculto?"

"That is a matter for future investigation. However, this is the situation as I see it—— Hello!"

The telephone bell at his elbow rang sharply.

"There is Ridler, I bet!" exclaimed Nick, and seized the instrument, putting the receiver to his ear. "Hello!" he spoke into the transmitter. "Yes, this is Carter. I understand. You are Mr. Ridler. I have been expecting to hear from you. Yes. You had the child awakened. What's that? Oh, her mother objected? Well, what did you learn?"

Patsy, watching his chief's face, saw it gradually expand in a broad smile as Nick listened to the message over the wire.

"Very well," he said at last. "I am glad that the spanking was not necessary to make Miss Nealie tell. Oh! but she got it anyway from her mother? Well, although the chastisement was probably urged by exasperation on Mrs. Ridler's part, I fancy that it will do Miss Nealie no lasting harm. Ah! She did put the pretty glass beads in the dollie, did she? And it looks to me, Mr. Ridler, as though you would have a nice time finding the dollie."

Nick Carter chuckled. Then suddenly he became serious.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "It's up to me to find the doll—and the necklace. Well, isn't that taking a good deal for granted, Mr. Ridler? You don't care what I ask—you agree to my terms in advance? And you have already dispatched a message to your other detective to drop the case and send in his bill? You are a precipitate man, Mr. Ridler—and I did not so judge you," chuckled Nick.

"Well, we will do what we can. But for Heaven's sake don't tell your domestics that there is still another detective on the case. No. I shall not come to the house, even. I fancy that the mere sight of a detective to your servants now would be like the flaunting of a red rag to a mad bull! Yes. I will do my best. Goodnight, Mr. Ridler."

CHAPTER V.

MAPPING THE CAMPAIGN.

Before Nick Carter had hung up the receiver he had reached for the button which summoned Joseph to the office.

"Is Mr. Chickering at home this evening, Joseph?" asked the chief.

"He is reading in his room, sir."

"I want him. Find out if Danny is downstairs. Keep him within call, if he is. And now, Patsy," said Nick as Joseph left the room, "what do you think of the guess I made this morning at the breakfast table? It has worked out pretty nearly as I suspected, hasn't it? The child was playing with the necklace and hid it in the broken doll. The maid doubtless saw her do it, and, although she might have been afraid of actually robbing her mistress herself—of aiding even in the re-

moval of the diamonds from the Ridler house—she was able to communicate with a pal and tell him where the gems were and how easily they might be stolen from Uncle Jerry Mellen."

"But when and how could she have communicated with this gun?" demanded Patsy. "That's what gets my goat!"

"And it is a matter that must occupy our closest attention—for through the discovery of the method of the maid's communication to her pal, we shall come to the person himself, and, finally, I hope, recover the necklace."

"I don't see how it can be Joe McNally!" grumbled Patsy.

"That was a theory of yours, Patsy," said Nick warningly. "And you want to be careful about forming theories before the facts are all before you."

"Confound it! He's just the sort of a fellow who might rap old Jerry over his nut and swipe his small change. Joe is a policy fiend—I found that out to be strictly true, just as Uncle Jerry said. And he was about the house where the doll surgeon lives yesterday—oh, yes, indeed! A dozen people saw and spoke with him.

"There was the list of policy gigs I found in Uncle Jerry's shop, too; and sure it is, the old man doesn't play the game! He hates it as the devil is said to hate holy-water!

"But how to connect Joe with this lady's maid—what's her name? Maria Deculto! That is a puzzle."

"There you go again!" exclaimed Nick. "Trying to bolster up a theory. There are hundreds of poor fools in that neighborhood who play policy. Somebody else beside the man who struck and robbed Mellen may have dropped the paper you found. Have a care, Patsy."

"I suppose I am running ahead of the game, chief," admitted the young man. "And besides, I fancy this Joe McNally is too big a swab to pull off a really big thing like the lifting of a forty-thousand-dollar-diamond necklace—eh?"

"Ah," said Nick smiling. "No man knows how really big he can be until the opportunity is offered him to be big!"

"Huh! Joe McNally is a mutt," declared Patsy. "I learned about all there was to be learned about him. He lives off his mother and his aunt. All the time he gets his books on goes into Denny Haloran's policy. The old man is right, at that, policy is sapping the life of a large number of the poor and medium class people in this city."

"It is the vampire of the tenements!" returned Nick vigorously. "I know what and who this Dennis Haloran is; and of one thing I am sure; such another menace to good citizenship does not exist in the confines of the City of New York! I'd like to get him right, Patsy."

"Mebbe this is your chance, chief," said the young man eagerly. "I tell you, I feel that this slip of policy numbers has something to do with the attack on Jerry Mellen, and the stealing of those diamonds——"

"Intuition, Patsy! Unworthy of you!" declared Nick, laughing.

"I don't care. If it should be proved that Joe McNally is the guilty man, I believe that policy will be behind it all. Talk about betting on the ponies being a 'bug'—it isn't a circumstance to policy. That gets a hold on the very poorest."

"I am afraid it will be a far cry from Mrs. Ridler's diamonds to the Policy King," returned Nick shaking his head.

"You got Tom Ratigan and sent him up the river, through that robbery of the old Perrine house, on Rutgers Street—and he didn't seem to have any connection with that game at first, chief," said Patsy.

"True. If you can pick up a thread of evidence, or learn anything definite about any of Dennis Haloran's shortcomings, while you are on this case, Patsy, don't let it get by you. Under the present administration of justice in this city and state it seems quite impossible to break up policy playing, and to put this Policy King where he belongs; but it may be done.

"And you will have the best chance of anybody to run into any such clue as I speak of, Patsy. I am going to send you back downtown at once, and you had better call Pop-eye to your assistance. He knows almost as much about the section of the town around Fourth Street as you do yourself—and a boy can go where you can't, shrewd as you are."

"You're right, chief," said Patsy. "And I'll be glad to have Mr. Pop-eye on my staff."

"Very well. You'd betttr pay some attention to this Joe McNally. Whether he did the trick himself, or not, he was about the house somewhere near the hour when the old man was assaulted. He might be a good witness against the real thief, if nothing more."

"But I can't understand his connection with this Maria Deculto," muttered Patsy.

"Don't you mind about *that* phase of it, my boy," said Nick cheerfully. "Do your part down there. We'll try up town here to see if we can put the [illegible] Dennis Haloran together."

Patsy had scarcely left the room when Chick came in. The recent developments in the case were quickly laid before Nick Carter's first assistant. As Chick had been the first to develop interest in the affair at all, he was naturally doubly excited now.

"I am going to place what I consider a very important part of our investigation of this case entirely in your hands, Chick," said his chief.

"And what is that, Nick?"

"You must watch Maria Deculto!"

"I appreciate that responsibility, Nick," said Chick.

"As she found opportunity to inform her pal of the possibility of stealing the gems, so she will try to communicate with him soon—if she has not already done so—to arrange for the disposal of them, and the division of the spoils."

"And you believe she has not done this?"

"I am quite sure she has not. And I will tell you why. Mr. Ridler tells me that the police and the private detective he engaged at first, have been hanging about the house, and hounding the domestics ever since they were called into the case. And that was immediately after the discovery of the loss of the necklace was communicated to Ridler himself by his wife, over the 'phone.

"Up to that time, this Maria Deculto had been overanxious to prove herself free of all connection with the missing gems. She had stuck to Mrs. Ridler like a burr; she had not been out of the lady's sight. By this means she hoped to assure her mistress that she, at least, was not guilty. She even demanded to be searched by the lady.

"So, you see, there could have been no communication between the maid and the man who really turned the trick at old Mellen's place, up to the time that the police and detectives were first in Ridler's house. Besides, it was about that time that the real robbery was being pulled off downtown. It was really an odd situation, Chick. The police were trying to solve a mysterious robbery at the very moment, perhaps, when that robbery was being done; for until the Unknown broke into Mellen's shop, and struck down the old man, and ran off with the doll, the necklace had not been stolen!"

"That's true, Nick," admitted Chickering. "It was a peculiar situation."

"Just so. Well, it stands to reason that while the police and this private detective—whoever he was—were in the Ridler house, the maid and her friend did no communicating."

"I see that."

"Mr. Ridler went home from here to-night, found that my suspicion was correct—that his little girl had hidden the necklace in the broken doll—and he immediately discharged the detective and his men. You see, it is only now—this evening—that Maria Deculto will be free to make any move toward seeing, or communicating with the man who committed the robbery.

"I want you to go to the Ridlers'. Hang about there, and don't you let anything get away from you. Maria is disliked by all the other domestics. Especially does the coachman, Jerome, a man who has been in the family for years, dislike the Italian. So you need not worry about any of the other help playing the go-between, or messenger, for Maria. If she has a letter to send, she will mail it herself. If she must keep a rendezvous, she will have to go out of the house.

"All you have got to do is to be sure you do not follow some other female," and Nick laughed. "You will probably see Danny around the place in the morning, and if you want to be relieved then for a while, I think it will be safe for you to work together. Danny will go to the Ridlers' stable early and get acquainted with Jerome. If Maria communicated with her pal in any ordinary way, while she was driving with her mistress and the child yesterday—and I do not understand how else she could have set the Unknown to work—Jerome will probably know something about it. Mrs. Ridler did not see her maid make any such communication, or she would have remarked it, and told her husband.

"There we are, Chick. We can be sure that the police themselves will watch the pawnbrokers and fences, and that the diamonds—in their present form, at least—will not get by them. We can turn our minds to the discovery of the guilty man, and his connection with Maria Deculto, who, it looks now, must be the prime mover in this loss of the Ridler necklace, and the assault on the doll surgeon."

CHAPTER VI.

THE NE'ER-DO-WELL.

Before Patsy Garvan left Nick Carter's Madison Avenue home he had telephoned a message to the A. D. T. office nearest Rutgers Street, to be sent over to the old Perrine house, where the boy whom they called Pop-eye lived. Patsy had once worked in that A. D. T. office himself, so they knew him there. Otherwise

they might have balked at taking a message for an unknown person with such a bizarre cognomen.

Pop-eye just fitted the lad, however, who met Patsy in front of the tenement house occupied by the doll surgeon, in answer to the message, an hour later. He was a skinny boy, with a bulging forehead, a hungry look, and a pair of eyes which stuck out largely. He really wasn't hungry nowadays, for Pop-eye was a protégé of Nick Carter's, and when he was not assisting the detective on some case, worked regularly in an office, received wages for the same, and besides, had his board and lodging free with the MacCormicks, caretakers of the house on Rutgers Street, owned by the millionaire soap manufacturer, Samuel Perrine.

So Pop-eye was "well-fixed," according to his own tell; he wouldn't have changed jobs with the "kink" of Spain, as he put it. But the hungry look must have remained with him from the time when he had been starving in the streets, and Nick Carter had rescued him. Naturally Pop-eye thought Nick was just about right, and there was nothing he gloried in so much as in assisting the detective, or one of his regular aids, on a case.

Patsy, in a few words, sketched the circumstances that had led to his own interest in the tenement house in which Jerry Mellen lived; and then he instructed Pop-eye in the part of the investigation which the boy was to handle. The ex-street gamin was "on" to his work at once, and Patsy knew that he could trust to his keenness and faithfulness, if not altogether to his judgment, in almost any emergency that might ensue.

On his own part, he started in to get direct information regarding Joe McNally, the ne'er-do-well. He had already, earlier in the day, and on behalf of his own private interest in Uncle Jerry's assailant, learned some few things about the man whom he half suspected of having struck the doll surgeon down, and of having stolen the little Ridler girl's doll and the necklace of diamonds inside it.

On the top floor of this tenement lived an aunt of McNally. Her husband was a truckman named Boss, who bore a good reputation in the neighborhood, and was known to look with disfavor on McNally. Mrs. Boss was a young woman, rather "highty," according to neighborhood gossip, and Boss didn't care much to have around either Joe McNally, or some other of his wife's friend, and relatives.

Joe, whenever he was in the neighborhood, did little but talk "spicy topics" and tried to inveigle every pretty face that he met to go into the game. More pertinent than old Jerry Mellen knew that Joe had tempted Mrs. Boss to invest some of her husband's money in policy, and the truckman's discovery of this fact had caused trouble in the top floor flat over the doll surgeon's shop.

Patsy did not want to be a "home wrecker," but he had certain facts to verify, and he believed Mrs. Boss, Joe McNally's youthful aunt, could help him in the matter. So he climbed the three flights of stairs and rapped on the kitchen door of the truckman's flat.

Boss, himself, came to the door, and in his stocking feet. He was a smiling, freckled-faced giant, with a shock of sandy hair, a wide mouth, and eyes that were so frank and companionable in their glance that it was almost impossible not to give him an answering smile before one spoke. He was the sort of a hard-working, hard-fisted mechanic, whose heart is as big, in comparison, as his huge body, but who is often easily persuaded and befooled by a pretty woman.

And Mrs. Boss was pretty—one of those frail-looking, highly colored, "smart" girls, born and brought up in the tenements, and who had spent several years working in a department store before Boss married her. She was a good girl, but shallow, and she had seen too much of the cheap luxuries of other girls, who had been her mates in the store, to be contented for any length of time in this little flat at the top of the East Fourth Street tenement house.

Sam Boss was a plodder and a saver; with the right kind of a helpmeet he would have a business of his own, and make money, and might even be a rich man before he died. But there was a doubt if Mayme Boss would be willing to do her share of the waiting, and contriving, and self-sacrifice necessary to bring about such a happy fate.

These facts Patsy had taken in earlier in the day along with the other information he had obtained. But now he was after some direct information, and he said to big Sam Boss:

"Good-evening, Mr. Boss. You don't know me, but I am a friend of old Jerry Mellen, below; and I'm trying to find out who the fellow was that rapped him over the head and stole his dough."

"Ah!" said Boss with some suspicion in his glance. "You ain't one of them detectives?"

"I'm not from the police station—no," said Patsy smiling. "But I am honestly interested in finding the gazabo that hit the old man."

"Well, mister! I'm with you in that," declared Boss. "What's your name?"

"Garvan."

"Come in, Mr. Garvan. This is my wife, Mr. Gar-

van," said Boss proudly, and indicating the smiling and pretty young woman sitting sewing under the table lamp.

"Proud I am to know her!" declared Patsy, bowing respectfully, and taking the chair Boss offered him. "I've heard about Mrs. Boss, and it isn't lies they're telling me, neither."

Patsy "had the blarneyin' tongue on him" when he wished to make use of it, and the respectful, but admiring, glance he cast on the pretty woman brought a flush to her cheeks, and a sparkle to her eyes, and made Boss smile the broader, for he was proud indeed of his wife.

"You mustn't believe all you hear, Mr. Garvan!" she declared with a toss of her head.

"But, sure, ma'am, I've got to believe me own eyes!" cried Patsy smartly, and Sam Boss shook in his chair with laughter at this interchange of a species of repartee that he both understood and approved of.

"He's got you there, Mayme! He's got you there!" he rumbled out. "And what is it you're wantin' of me, Mr. Garvan?"

"Why, I guess, after all, it's of Mrs. Boss I wanted to ask a few questions," said Patsy. "She's home all day, and you're not. You were in the house when the old man was hurt yesterday, weren't you, Mrs. Boss?" pursued Nick Carter's assistant.

"Indeed, I was," said Mayme Boss. "I don't see for the life of me how that wretch—whoever he was—could have got in at the old man and none of us women—to say nothing of the kids in the house—seeing him. Poor Uncle Jerry!"

"Well, there's some of 'em think they *did* see the fellow," said Patsy.

"What!" grunted Boss lighting his pipe. "Have they got any idea who the rascal was?"

"Somebody started the idea, and I'm afraid it's taken with a number of the neighbors," said Patsy slowly shaking his head.

"What d'ye mean, Mr. Garvan?" demanded the truckman gazing at the young fellow curiously.

"I'll tell ye," said Patsy earnestly. "This here ain't a pleasant matter, and I hated to come to Mrs. Boss with it——"

Boss took the pipe from his mouth and looked at Patsy strangely. "I'll be thankin' you to say what you mean by that?" he demanded. "Whatever can my Mayme know about the feller that hit Mellen?"

"Oh, the gentleman doesn't mean *that*, I guess, Sam," interposed Mrs. Boss, smiling doubtfully at Patsy.

"That's just it, sir," said the latter shaking his head. "It's Mrs. Boss mebbe can help me. You see, she was here in the house when Jerry was hurt——"

"I'm not denyin' she was," said Boss sternly.

"I was here all the time, of course," interposed the young woman quickly. "And I heard the other women screamin' and went down to help pick Uncle Jerry up. But that was all of an hour after he was hurt. So he told us when the doctor brought him to."

"You can fix the time pretty near, can't you, Mrs. Boss?" said Patsy.

"Oh, it's the time ye want," said Boss grunting, and settling back in his chair again, and beginning once more to puff on his pipe in a relieved way.

"It was a quarter to one when I heard the disturbance and ran down to see what it was about. I know, for Sam comes home to dinner at one, and I had just popped the potatoes into the pot——"

"And they go burnt," grunted Sam, sotto voce.

"Huh! If Uncle Jerry had been killed, you'd kick over a burned potato, Sam," said his pretty wife pouting. "I couldn't help the water boiling off 'em while I was downstairs."

Sam chuckled, and Patsy broke into this exchange of domestic felicities:

"A quarter to one, eh? And the old man remembered it was about a quarter to twelve when he was assaulted?"

"Yes," said Mayme unsuspiciously.

"Well, what time was Joe McNally here yesterday morning, and what time was it when he went away?"

The question, which Patsy put in the most matter-of-fact tone of voice, had a paralyzing effect upon both his hearers. Sam Boss removed the pipe slowly from his lips, and stared hard at the visitor over the spiral of smoke that rose from the bowl; his wife dropped her work in her lap, and her thin fingers interlocked nervously. She did not look at Patsy, however, but her blue eyes sought her husband's rugged face, and she looked frightened.

"So!" grunted Sam at last, still staring at Patsy. "Just put that question again, my man?"

Patsy did so, still smiling, and quite ignoring the fact that he had thrown a bomb into this peaceful camp.

"And what makes you ask my wife, Mr. Garvan, any such question? What should she be knowin' about that ne'er-do-well?" said Boss, in the same slow, thick tone.

"She is the fellow's aunt, isn't she?" asked Patsy mildly.

"More's the pity! But 'tis not her fault. She knows nothing about that fellow."

"Won't you let Mrs. Boss speak for herself in this matter?" queried Patsy quietly. "You see, it happens to be a matter of serious moment——"

"What is?" asked Boss.

"The time Joe McNally was here."

"Do you mean here—here in my house?" growled Boss.

"I wish to ascertain the time when your wife saw Joe McNally yesterday morning," said Patsy firmly. "There are people who have been unkind enough to suggest that Joe knows more than he should about the assault on Uncle Jerry. Now, I am not trying to entangle Joe in any such suspicion, but I am anxious to get at the truth."

"Hear that!" ejaculated Boss, suddenly turning his dully glowing eyes on his wife. "It's what it has come to at last, Mayme. I told you I would not stand for that ne'er-do-well coming around here. You promised he should not come; that you'd speak to your sister and she'd keep him away. And see what has come of it!"

Mayme began to fire under the contempt of his tone. There were tears in her eyes, but she fought them back.

"I don't care what you think of Joe, Sam; he wouldn't be guilty of hurting old Uncle Jerry."

"But he's suspected of it!" flashed back Sam.

"I don't believe it! This man——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Patsy soothingly. "Let's stick to facts. I don't say Joe was in any way connected with this mystery; but we want to clear him if we can. I know the kind of a fellow he is—weak, but not wicked——"

"That's exactly it!" cried Mayme hotly. "He is weak; but there's nothing vicious about Joe."

"What do you call a fellow that goes snoopin' about a man's home when he is out and temptin' his women folks to spend their money on policy drawings and such?" burst out Sam, beginning to puff on his pipe again ferociously, and keeping at it till he choked!

"It was my money!" cried Mayme. "You gave it to me."

"For a new hat—yes. It was your money. I wasn't saying it wasn't your money," returned Sam after a moment. "But he's a ne'er-do-well, just the same, and I've said I wouldn't have him around here."

"You'd been glad enough if I'd won when I played policy, Sam," declared his angry wife, tossing her head.

"By Heaven, I wouldn't!" cried the man, suddenly rising and flinging his pipe into the coalhod, where the clay was smashed to atoms. "I hope you—and every other foolish woman that does the same—will lose her money, and continue to lose it in the game. It is bad enough to gamble and lose; it's hell to gamble and win!

"I've seen it—I've seen it, time and time again. I know a dozen families—and right in this block, too—that's ruined, body and soul, by policy. Whether it's the wife that plays, or the husband, there's nothing but ruin follows it. If they win once or twice, it just whets their appetite for more. And if a man wins two dollars he spends ten dollars more to try and win another two! I warned you against letting Joe McNally lead you into any such foolishness. Mayme—— I beg your pardon, sir!" broke off Boss suddenly, and looking significantly at Patsy. "This ain't anything to you. It doesn't interest you."

"Not at all," admitted Patsy frankly, and ignoring the fact that Mrs. Boss was weeping softly into the work on which she had been sewing. "But I am interested in clearing Joe of this suspicion that has sprung up against him."

"I'm not!" growled Boss. "Let him suffer. He deserves anything that comes to him, good or bad—and I'm blamed sure little good will ever come to Joe McNally."

"Is that the way to talk about my own sister's son, Sam Boss?" demanded his wife, suddenly spurred to the defensive. "I don't care if Joe is a ne'er-do-well, as you call him; he wouldn't do such a wicked thing as to hurt and rob Uncle Jerry."

"Let him clear himself, then," growled Sam.

"Let me clear him of the charge, Mrs. Boss, if I can," interposed Patsy quietly. "We know he was here yesterday morning. A dozen people saw him and spoke with him. I want to get at the time."

"He went away long before Uncle Jerry was attacked," said Mayme quickly.

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, Mr. Garvan, I am," she reiterated. "Joe knocked on the door when I was sweeping, at ten o'clock. I know it was just ten, for I had the windows open and I heard the church clock on Second Avenue strike the hour just as Joe rapped on the door. I—I didn't let Joe in," she faltered, looking sideways at

her husband. "He only came to bring me something from my sister, anyway. And he didn't stop. He went right downstairs and out of the house, after we'd passed the time of day."

"You're sure he left the house?"

"Why—er—I s'pose he did. He said he was going on another errand."

"Where?" asked Patsy quickly.

"Where was he going?"

"Yes. Just tell me that. You see, Mrs. Boss, if Joe went right to that place, we can figure very clearly and easy about how long he stayed in this house after ten o'clock."

The young woman hesitated, and her pretty face began to flush again. Her husband, who leaned against the mantelpiece now, glowering at them both, and his face not pleasant to look at, missed nothing of her look or further speech:

"He—he said he was going to Dawley's."

"Where's Dawley's?" asked Patsy.

"It's on Avenue A."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"I'll tell you," broke in Sam hastily. "It's a pool and billiard room. There's somebody makes a bookbook on the ponies there every day, and Dawley himself is one of Denny Haloran's agents."

"Haloran, the Policy King?" asked Patsy.

"That's who." Joe was going there to play, and to take the money of other foolish people who play through him. Joe gets a commission on all the suckers he can get—and they let him win a dollar or two now and then."

Mayme tossed her head, and picked up her sewing again. She had become sullen, and Patsy saw that it would be useless to try to get her to talk any more. He feared he had done harm enough, as it was; but he had seen no other way of getting at the facts he had to learn.

If Joe McNally was guiltless of the assault and robbery of the doll surgeon, what Mrs. Boss had already said, would save him; if he was guilty, what she had said would help forge the fetters for the fellow—and Patsy knew that well.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COIL OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

Young Carter left the house of the doll surgeon and went directly to Avenue A. The last only to ask the policeman on post to learn where Dawley's was, and to get inside information about the place. Because places of ill-resort, and run by bad characters, are known to the police, it does not follow that the places themselves can either be shut up, or the proprietors sent where they belong—to the Island, or to Sing Sing.

The policeman assured Patsy that Dawley did sell policy, and was really one of Dennis Haloran's chief agents in the game. "And if you're one of these slick guys that are around for the Society for the Prevention of Vice, that occasionally turns its attention to these policy sharps," advised the officer, "take my tip. Keep out of 'Bug' Dawley's clutches. If he gets you in his place, and he knows what you're after, there's a plenty fellows on his ticket that can be got to 'do' you."

"Think so, do you?" queried Patsy.

"I *know* so, my boy," declared the cop. "The feller that was on this post ahead of me had a whirl with Dawley once. Dawley got sore on him because the officer reported at the station that the women and children hanging about the joint in the afternoon, waiting to hear what the drawings were for the day, was a public disgrace and nuisance to the neighborhood. One day the officer was called into a house by a woman to stop a fight, as he thought. A bunch of plugs fell on him, threw him down two flights of stairs, beat him with his own stick, ripped off his badge and near choked him to death with it, and he was in the hospital two months—an' not one of them was ever arrested. And poor Billy Snyder is chasin' goats yet, up in the Bronx! I tell you, Dawley's got a ghog that's something fierce!"

"I'll certainly fight shy of him, then," said Patsy. "I'm only wanting to know about a guy that sometimes hangs around there."

"Who is he?"

"Joe McNally."

"Oh, he's no good. And Dawley won't care what you do with Joe. He's only one of the suckers himself."

Patsy ventured into the so-called "billiard parlor," which was in a basement, with the windows so well screened that, from the sidewalk, little of what was going on inside could be seen. There was quite a crowd of young fellows using the tables, for pool mostly, billiards being altogether too scientific a game for them.

Patsy immediately picked out the proprietor—"Bug" Dawley—although he had asked nobody for a description of the man. In one corner sat a group of older

men than those playing at the tables, and the central figure of the group was a short, fleshy man, in a white waistcoat and clean linen, who was prosperous-looking indeed.

He was red-faced, with rather a bulbous nose, and little, twinkling black eyes, half closed by the rolls of fat about them. They gave his round face a cunning expression—and this, indeed, was the only expression there was in Dawley's face at any time.

Patsy immediately attracted the man's attention, and when Dawley looked toward him, Nick Carter's assistant nodded and winked, moving off into a quiet corner to show Dawley that he wanted to speak with him in private. The proprietor quickly complied with this dumb request, and met Patsy with both curiosity and a crafty smile.

"What's wantin', young feller?" he asked in a husky voice.

"You're Dawley?" asked Patsy.

"Sure. Somebody send you to me?"

"Yep. I wanted to ask you, on the quiet, some questions about a guy that comes here."

Dawley's little black eyes narrowed.

"Don't ask me nothin' I can't answer," he said. "I don't often give out information about the people that come in my place. That ain't what I'm here for."

"That's all right," said Patsy easily. "This ain't goin' to hurt you, or your place; and I don't know for sure whether it'll hurt the guy I speak of either."

"Who is he?"

"Joe McNally. You know him?"

"Yes, I know him."

"I understand he is in here every day."

"I don't know where you got your information," said Dawley, "but Joe is in here pretty frequent."

"He plays it reg'lar, I understand," said Patsy carelessly. "Now, he's been doing something a little shady, I am afraid, with some coin that was entrusted with him for to play the game——"

"Whachu talkin' about?" demanded Dawley with suspicion.

Patsy winked largely at the proprietor of the poolroom, and went right on:

"Some friends of mine have been playin' through Joe for some time; but they just got wise to the fact that there's a hold-up somewheres. Some 'gigs' they played day before yesterday come out good in the drawings; but they didn't get a smell of the mezumah, and they are kinder trying to get cases on Joe."

"I don't know nothin' about it," declared Dawley gruffly.

"I don't suppose you do," returned Patsy. "But I'd consider it a favor if you'd tell me what time Joe came in here yesterday morning."

"Look here, mister," said Dawley. "I don't know you, and I ain't free to talk to them as I don't know. But if you, or your friends want to play, why don't you come straight to headquarters? These dopes like Joe McNally will always rob ye. And if Joe has been holdin' back coin that ought to have been put down on the drawin's, I know just how he'll get the head punched off him; see?"

The fellow snarled this out in his husky voice, and with a vicious intonation that showed exactly what he was under his veneer of good nature and apparently easy-going disposition.

"Well, we don't know that Joe done us," said Patsy coolly. "What time did he get in here yesterday—do you remember?"

"Sure. I can tell you easy. I was eating my dinner when McNally came in. I have it sent in from Hensen's on the corner."

"What time was it?"

"Hensen's got a standing order to send it in sharp at twelve," said Dawley. "And if he don't do it, there's a row. Joe come along while I was eating."

"Between twelve and quarter past, then?" suggested Patsy.

"Nearer quarter past—yes. That would be it."

"All right, Mr. Dawley. That's what I was trying to find out."

"Oh, Joe got here in good time to put down anything he wanted to for the day," whispered Dawley huskily. "And if he didn't do it, you lemme know, will ye? I'll see that he gits his!" and the desperate temper of the man looked for an instant out of his piglike eyes.

"I'll be around to see you again," agreed Patsy.

"Do so!" said the fellow cordially. "And if you and your friends want to play the game right, or wish to put down a small bet on the races any day, come in here. I can introduce you to somebody that will accommodate you," and he winked "deevilish sly."

Patsy thanked him with a smiling face, and a desire in his soul to kick him! Then he left the poolroom and traveled back to Fourth Street to pick up Pop-eye. That shrewd urchin was "camping" on the steps of the tenement where the doll surgeon lived, and he had with him another youth, but a boy somewhat older and a good deal bigger than Pop-eye.

"Hey, kid! Who you got there?" asked Patsy,

eying the heavy-featured stranger. The latter was evidently an Italian, his face was smirched with coal dust; he had crisp, closely clipped black hair, heavy cheeks, a wide slit of a mouth, and a general sullen appearance. But his black eyes were sharp and watchful.

"Dis is me big brudda, Sylvester," said Pop-eye grinning. "Dat's his name—Sylvester, and he's a dago."

"That's plain as cheese," returned Patsy. "But what does he know?"

"He works for another dago that sells coal and wood and ice to the folks that live in this here house. There's the cellar across the street," said Pop-eye, pointing to the basement shop outside which there was the usual badly painted sign to the effect that Tony Balloro sold the necessaries named.

"All right. What you holding him for?"

"So's you could question him, Mr. Patsy," said Pop-eye. "He says he often goes into this house, and he was in and out of it several times yesterday morning. He was going in there with a bag of coal when the women found out that the old man had been hurted."

"Indeed," said Patsy, turning to the surly-looking youth. "So, Sylvester, you were around here about the time Uncle Jerry was hurt?"

"No. I nota say so," exclaimed the Italian youth, his eyes flashing suddenly, as though with anger. "I come to da house when dey finda de old signor. Yes!"

"Ah! That is different," admitted Patsy with a quizzical smile. "But you were about here all the morning, I suppose? You can see people going into the house and coming out, from your place over there?" and Patsy pointed to the coal and wood cellar.

"*Si, signor,*" muttered the fellow.

"Did you see any stranger hanging about—any man that you had never seen before, or one you had seen but seldom at the house?"

Sylvester shook his head. Pop-eye whispered in Patsy's ear:

"Ask him about that mutt, Joe McNally."

Patsy nodded, and said to the Italian:

"How about Mr. McNally. Do you know him?"

"I knowa heem," admitted Sylvester.

"He was here yesterday morning?"

"Si, signor."

"When did you first see him yesterday morning?"

"I'm-a-no-see."

"You save it was ten?"

"Jesta de minute before ten. I hear de clock str-r-r-rike—yes! I see McNal' come upa da street. He run into da house. He go up da stair——"

"How do you know this?" interposed Patsy. "Did you watch him? Did you see him go upstairs?"

"Suah, I did!" declared Sylvester nodding his head vigorously. "Mis' Boss, she holler outa da wind' for fi' centa da ice. I start over wit' da ice an' McNal', he come along. He go up da stair ahead—you see?"

"I see," said Patsy. "And this was at ten o'clock?"

"Just b'fore da clock str-r-r-rike," repeated the Italian rolling his "r's" with dramatic force.

"And when did Joe come down again?"

"McNal'? He notta come down right away—no. But I see him standin' in da door here afterward."

"When? What time? How long after he went upstairs?"

"How long after he wenta up da stair? It mebbe half an hour—one halfa da hour, you say, eh, signor?"

"You're telling the story, not me," said Patsy. "Let's hear more about it."

"About McNal'?"

"Sure. He didn't go away right after he came down from the upper floor, did he?"

"No, no!" cried Sylvester earnestly. "He staya da long time here. He talka da lot. Some peep' know he stay b'sides me, Sylvest'."

"Sure they do," said Patsy. "I've talked with them already. But they couldn't tell when Joe came and when he went away from the house."

"*Si, signor;* I know," said Sylvester darkly.

"Well, mebbe you do," admitted Patsy. He had noted one point already; this boy's story conflicted with Mrs. Boss' in the particular that the young woman had declared Joe had been at her flat only a few minutes, and then had gone away. But the Italian said it was half an hour before he came down from the upper floor. As Mayme Boss knew her husband did not want McNally hanging about the place, she naturally neglected to give the exact facts in this connection. It was easy to believe the Italian's story thus far.

"Well, he was down-stairs, you say, half an hour after he first came to the house. That was half-past ten," continued Patsy. "That's right, eh?"

"*Si, signor.*"

"Did you notice what he did then?"

"He standa here in da door and smok'a da cigarette," declared Sylvester, going through the motions of smoking one himself.

"Does he smoke a good deal, I wonder?" observed Patsy.

"Sylvest' tells me dat McNally is de re'l goods when it comes to burnin' sweets," interposed Pop-eye. "He's a bug, all right."

"A cigarette fiend? Another count against him," murmured Patsy.

"He bada man," observed Sylvester darkly.

"So I hear," said Patsy. "Well, go on. What did McNally do after he had smoked his cigarette?"

"He talka to anybody what come outa da house. He go in and come outa da house heemself t're, fower—more time! Sometimes he go up da stairs again."

"Up to the Boss' flat?"

"No, no! And he go back t'roo da house, and he staya da long time—*si, signor!*"

"When was this?" asked Patsy, eyeing the Italian doubtfully.

"This was da long time aft' he come—yes! I not see when he go back dat way—no. But I see heem come out."

"Oh, you did, eh?" demanded Patsy with increasing interest.

"*Si, signor.*"

"And did you know what time that was?"

"*Si, signor.* Eet was when he lefta da house."

"Ah! When he came from the rear—through the hall, you mean?"

Sylvester nodded furiously.

"At that time he went directly away from the house?"

"Sure," declared Sylvester.

"Was anybody with him?"

"No, no!" cried the boy, shaking his head violently.

"Did he speak to anybody here in the doorway at that time—when he left?"

"No, no!" cried the boy, shaking his head violently again, added, "There nobody here then. Nobody on da step nobody in da hall. No, no!"

"Sure of that?"

"*Si, signor.*"

"And the time? What time was it when McNally left the house?" demanded Patsy, unable to control entirely the eagerness he felt.

"It on da dinner time. Eet blowa da whist' an' heem he hall right aft' McNal' go," declared Sylvester, nodding his head violently again.

Patsy stood at him steadily in the light of the street lamp. There was no expression in the Italian's face but it naturally sullen one. He seemed to tell all this without an atom of assumed feeling. One could not imagine that he felt any animosity toward the ne'er-do-well, Joe McNally.

Yet, what he said was entangling the ne'er-do-well closer and closer in the coil of circumstance.

Patsy suddenly demanded: "Where were you, Sylvester, at this time?"

The heavy-faced youth looked at him with twinkling eyes, but slow comprehension.

"Where I? When da McNal' leav'a da house?"

"Yes."

"I go up to Mis' Filscow's—secon' da floor," he said with a shrug of his shoulders, and an illuminating gesture of both hands. "I carra da coal. I looka down an' see McNal' run from da back of da house. He r-r-r-run out!" exclaimed Sylvester emphatically.

"Did he see you?"

Sylvester shook his head vigorously, but added: "I see heem!"

"And this was at noontime?"

"*Si, signor.*"

Patsy thought over the situation, and what the young Italian had said, for some moments. Finally he nodded and spoke to Sylvester:

"That's all right. It sounds straight enough. You were about here all the two hours, from ten till twelve, while McNally was here?"

"*Si, signor.*"

"Didn't go out of sight of the house here?"

"No, no!" declared Sylvester.

"All right. I'll see you to-morrow again. I may have some more questions to ask you then. And you won't lose anything by answering them straight. Don't talk to other people about this—understand?"

"*Si, signor.*"

"By the way, Sylvester," said Patsy, as he and Pop-eye were turning away. "Did you see a carriage stop here at the door yesterday morning, somewhere about eleven o'clock? A fine carriage, with a coachman in livery driving? There was a lady and a little girl in it, and a maid. Did you see it?"

Sylvester still stared at him sullenly, and, after a moment of seeming thought, shook his head.

"I no see dat," he said. "I no see da carriage."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE BALANCE.

Patsy reported to Nick Carter before breakfast the next morning. Nick was still absent. So Patsy had only then gone over to Fifth Avenue to relieve Nick's

first assistant in his watch over Mr. Johnstone Ridler's residence.

All that young Garvan had learned in the house where the doll surgeon lived, and in Dawley's place on Avenue A, and what he had got out of Sylvester, was carefully laid before Nick by the young man, for Patsy had a wonderfully retentive memory, and the testimony he had gathered, lost little in its repetition.

"You have done remarkably well, Patsy," said Nick. "Did you see Joe McNally at all?"

"I found out where he lived—it's on Eighth Street, and I learned that he was at home. He hasn't seemed to try to make any getaway. If he is guilty of assaulting Uncle Jerry and robbing him—and likewise of stealing the Ridler necklace—he seems so confident that he won't be suspected, that he isn't making any break for the tall timber, chief."

"That is, you do not know that he is?" said Nick.

"Well, I figured that even if he did take a sneak, he wouldn't be able to get far. He isn't a very smart guy, according to all reports. If he's got the diamonds it's through a fluke, I verily believe."

"And not because he is in cahoots with Mrs. Ridler's maid?" laughed Nick.

"Well, Nick, that's the way I feel," admitted Patsy.

"And you didn't even leave Pop-eye to watch this McNally?"

"No, I didn't, chief."

"Why not?"

"To tell the truth," blurted out Patsy, "I had something else for him to do. Mebbe I'm wrong, but I believed there was another person who needed reckoning up more than McNally."

"Humph!" said Nick. "Who was that, may I ask?"

Patsy looked at him sideways for a moment, hesitated, and then blurted out :

"Sylvester!"

"The Italian?"

"Sure."

"Why? Not because he was an Italian, Patsy, surely? The maid is of that nationality, of course."

"That didn't enter my mind," admitted Patsy frankly.

"Then why, after Sylvester had told you so much convincingly pointing to McNally, and without showing any particular animosity against that fellow, did you suspect the Italian enough to leave Pop-eye as a guard over his movements?"

"Nick," said Patsy seriously, "I'll tell you what got my goat with that dago. I was impressed mighty strongly with his story. He seemed to be giving it to us as straight as a string. And up to the end, I was willing to give him every benefit of the doubt, and accept his evidence at its face value."

"And something queered him with you at the final point?"

"That's it, chief. And I bet you saw it, too, when I told his story to you. It was about that carriage of the Ridlers. Now, we know the carriage went to Uncle Jerry's, and it must have stood outside there for some few minutes while the dame and the kid were inside—eh?"

"Very true."

"Even if it had only been driven slowly up and down the street while they were inside, it would be noticed all right in that neighborhood."

"Certainly it would seem so."

"And if Sylvester noticed all that about McNally, he would have noticed the carriage, too. That's where the queer point lies. All Sylvester said sounded as though it had really happened. Now, he didn't change his manner, or expression, or do a bit of a fumble, when he swore he hadn't seen any carriage. But, by thunder! if he had been watching McNally as close, and the house as close, as he must have watched to be able to give me all the points he did, he couldn't have helped seeing that carriage!"

"I believe you are right, Patsy," declared Nick, nodding his head and smiling. "And I am proud of you, my boy, that you should have seen that discrepancy in the Italian's testimony."

"But what does it mean?" demanded Patsy. "What do you think of it?"

"I don't know what it means, and I positively have no opinion at present upon the point of Joe McNally's guilt or innocence. We must wait. Let us hear what Chick has to tell us, and later, what Danny manages to learn from the Ridlers' coachman."

But Chickering, when he came to breakfast, after his long night's vigil outside the Ridler mansion, had nothing to report. Nobody had stirred out of the house during the night, and until Danny relieved him he had seen none of the females, either of the family or servants, saving a housemaid sweeping the vestibule and steps.

Patsy, who was comparatively fresh, for he had had several hours' sleep, returned to the Ridler house to relieve Danny and allow that young man to rub up against old Jerome, the coachman, if he could. Chick-

ering retired for a nap and Nick himself went downtown personally to look over the scene of the attack on the doll surgeon, and the subsequent robbery, and likewise to see and judge between Joe McNally and the Italian boy, Sylvester.

Really, Danny's errand was the most important phase of the case just at this time, and we will go with Danny.

When Patsy came to the house to take his place, Danny had already learned where the Ridlers kept their horses, in a private stable around in Thirty-first Street. Jerome had left the servants' entrance of the residence and gone to the stable to overlook his hostlers, but as near as he could learn from the talkative scullery maid, who had been washing the areaway, and whom Danny had got acquainted with, there was no order so early in the morning for the carriage.

Mr. Johnstone Ridler always drove to business in his motor car; but the car was kept at a public garage in the neighborhood, and the chauffeur was not considered "one of the family" by the other servants; he was a Frenchman and lived in his own flat on the West Side somewhere with his wife and children. Danny was particular to learn these things, to see if there could be any connection between the lady's maid, Maria Deculto, and the chauffeur, but he learned that Mrs. Ridler did not like the car, and seldom rode in it, and that the maid would have no occasion to come in contact with the Frenchman.

When Patsy came, therefore, Danny bustled around to the stable on Thirty-first Street. There were two young men—one of whom acted as footman on occasions—cleaning the horses and washing carriages, while old Jerome—a pompous old boy in spats, a red woolen vest, and with correcly rimmed gray whiskers on either side of his face—walked about with his hands in his pockets and his pipe in his mouth.

Danny approached him, cap off, and very obsequiously, and opened the conversation by asking for a job. He said he had heard that Jerome wanted an apprentice, that, he, Danny, had handled horses all his life, and needed work.

"Who told you I wanted another hand, lad?" demanded the coachman. "I have me troubles, as it is, keeping these two lazy whelps at work," and he looked with fire in his eye and disgust in his tone at the two hostlers.

"One of the women told me at the house," said Danny unblushingly.

"At Mr. Ridler's house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, who'd have the impidence to tell ye such a story?" growled old Jerome. "One o' thim snippy housemaids, I bet."

"No. She was a foreign-looking woman."

"Hoo!" cried Jerome, forgetting to draw on his pipe, and his short hair fairly bristling with rage. "Was she as ugly as sin itself?"

"Pretty near," admitted Danny with gravity.

"That Maria!" ejaculated Jerome fiercely. "She lied to ye, boy. I don't want another helper. I got help enough—too much. But I'd like to stop the mouth of her—the impidint hussy!"

"I seen her driving out with you the other day," said Danny grinning slyly.

"When was this?" demanded the coachman, puffing out his cheeks and looking altogether like an angry turkey-cock.

"Why—day before yesterday, Mr. Jerome."

"Riding with me?" repeated the coachman. "Huh! The mistress and little Miss Nealie was with us."

"Not when I seen you," Dannie declared.

"Where was this?"

"Downtown. I seen you drivin' in Fourth Street, and that woman was alone in the carriage."

"Pshaw! I remember," grunted Jerome. "But it was for only a short time, thank Heaven! The dago—and her dirty dago friends! I wouldn't keep the horses standing before the door, or I'd have had every Italian out of the cellars thereabout crowding around the kerridge."

"Does she know them all down there, then?" asked Danny.

"I don't know how many she knows," grunted Jerome. "But there is sure one that knows her and always speaks to her when we drive down there to the ould man who keeps the doll hospital."

"So that maid knows one of her own countrymen in that locality?" repeated Danny.

"She does that. And as ugly looking lad he is—as ugly as she is."

"Did you see him the other day?" asked the inquisitor gently.

"Sure! Didn't I tell you he ran out of the cellar across the street and spoke to her, and she to him? That's why I drove up and down while we waited for the mistress. I didn't know how many other relatives of hers might pop out on us."

"Her lover, mebbe?" suggested Danny slyly.

"Lord, no!" responded Jerome, smiling broadly again. "She's a woman, and he is but a lad. I seen them

speaking together before when we've drove down there—so I told you. And she gives him money—I seen her."

"Ho, ho!" commented Danny, who showed an interest in this gossip which pleased the old coachman.

"I tell you what I think," whispered Jerome, moving farther away from his helpers with Danny. "She's a great gambler, that Eye-talian woman."

"She is?"

"Sure. She's buyin' lottery tickets, and chances in raffles, and the like, with all her wages. So I belave. I know she plays policy, and it's a bad example she sets to the rest of the gur-rls in the house. Day before yesterday she gave that dago boy some money and a list of numbers—oh, I seen her," declared Jerome, nodding his head sagely. "I can't understand their lingo, but I got a pair of eyes in me head, and I ain't sat on a coachman's box for twenty-odd years without learnin' to look behind me when I'm supposed to be only seein' straight ahead!"

"Good for you, old top!" cried Danny. "Now I'll beat it, as you haven't any job for me," and he hurried to the nearest telephone, called up the house, and learned from Joseph where Nick was then. Finding that the chief had gone to the scene of the assault and robbery, Danny hurried to Fourth Street, so as to report in person.

He easily found Nick, who, in a simple disguise, was loafing about the neighborhood, picking up such crumbs of information as he could. Danny's tale easily connected the boy Sylvester, with Maria Deculto, Mrs. Ridler's maid. Nick had already been assured that the maid was the person who had had the only opportunity of knowing how little Nealie had hidden the necklace in the broken doll. There was no evidence connecting the maid with Joe McNally; but Jerome's story suggested a plain understanding between the sullen Sylvester, who was willing to tell so much that was hurtful to McNally, and Maria Deculto.

"The balance of suspicion between the two is pretty nearly even," said Nick to his chauffeur. "Joe McNally had every opportunity to commit the deed; and he is the sort of a weak fellow who would easily be led into such an act: but it seems that he could not have known the necklace was in Uncle Jerry's shop.

"On the other hand, this Sylvester was in and out of the house all the forenoon, too; undoubtedly he is the Italian lad who is so well known to Maria. She would have had time to tell him, in her own language—which Jerome does not understand—about the necklace of diamonds in little Nealie Ridler's doll. Sylvester could have struck down Uncle Jerry and committed the robbery just as well as McNally. He is a sturdy lad for his age.

"There you are! Either of these fellows may be guilty. We may be inclined to exonerate McNally, and to believe the Italian guilty. But we want something beside suspicion on which to base a warrant for arrest.

"And they both play policy, do they? Oddly enough, Patsy may be right in his first idea of the case. That great evil of cheap gambling may be the mainspring of both these crimes."

CHAPTER IX.

PATSY ON THE TRAIL.

Patsy Garvan, who had learned to dress so as to be scarcely noticeable, either in a crowd or walking alone, managed to keep the Ridler house in view during the forenoon without being observed or suspected himself by any of its inmates. Once or twice, when some of the servants appeared, or a tradesman stopped at the door, young Garvan wandered past, eager to pick up any shred of conversation; but nothing of moment happened until mid-forenoon.

Then Mr. Ridler's automobile came around from the garage, stopped before the door, and almost at once the butler swung open the door for his master to come forth.

As Johnstone Ridler descended the steps there was a flash of bright color in the doorway behind him, and Patsy heard a feminine voice cry:

"Johnstone, wait!"

The gentleman turned with a smile, although he had his watch in his hand and was evidently in a hurry.

"Yes, my dear?" he said.

"Can you go around by Fourth Street and see how poor Uncle Jerry is—and take him something nice from the pantry?"

It was evidently Mrs. Ridler who asked the question, and Patsy saw that she was a very pretty little woman. Mr. Ridler had already showed that he thought a good deal of his wife, and he hesitated now as he studied his watch.

"My dear, I am sorry to refuse you," he said. "But really, every moment of my time will be taken up to-day until five or six o'clock. I am already late for my first appointment. Can you not send to Uncle Jerry Mellen's—or drive there yourself by and by?"

"I shall be engaged with dressmakers all day, Johnstone."

"Well, well! send Maria down in the carriage."

"Now, Johnstone, you know that that crotchety old Jerome has refused to drive the maid anywhere alone. Really, it is ridiculous how we are at the mercy of that old tyrant!" and she laughed.

Mr. Ridler laughed, too, but said: "You must learn to like the motor car, and then we will get a second chauffeur like Réné, here, and I'll pension Jerome. Send the maid in a cab—or in the car. It won't hurt her to ride in a street car and carry a basket."

He hurried down to the waiting automobile, and Mrs. Ridler disappeared. But this conversation that Patsy had overheard while he lingered at the foot of the house steps, prepared Nick Carter's assistant for the appearance on the street, in about an hour, of the maid in question, Maria Deculto, with a small hat box in her hand, which she evidently considered a more ladylike bundle than a basket!

She walked easterly and took a Fourth Avenue car south. Patsy did not miss getting on that car, too, but he tried to remain out of Maria Deculto's sight.

The lady's maid was heavily veiled, but she had only pulled the veil down over her face as she came out of the house, and Patsy had seen her countenance clearly enough to be sure that he had made no mistake. She was an ugly-looking woman, without a bit of color in her face, a blotchy-brown skin, and dull eyes.

At Fourth Street and the Bowery the woman left the car. Patsy had risked getting off a block above, and he saw her leave the car, and was sufficiently near her to keep the veiled woman in sight as she turned through the side street on which the doll surgeon lived.

Maria went directly to the tenement house, entered it, and was within some few minutes. Patsy did not go very near to the place, but from where he stood at the corner he carefully searched the neighborhood with his sharp eyes to find, if possible, Nick Carter. He knew that Nick would know him at first sight; but he had no idea how thoroughly his chief would be disguised when he set out to work around the scene of the assault and robbery.

The maid came out finally, and instead of going directly back toward the car line, Patsy saw her deliberately cross the street and move slowly along the sidewalk on which he was standing. There was the coal and wood cellar of Tony Balorro at hand, and out of it slouched the figure of Sylvester.

He spoke to the maid, but she walked on and stood in front of a grocer's before she would deign to converse with him. Then she darted sharp glances all about, as Patsy plainly saw, before she became confidential with her fellow countryman.

Patsy understood and spoke Italian perfectly; he knew by the excited gestures of the two that they were discussing something of importance; but he could not hear a word from where he stood, and the fact that he was missing something of grave importance worried him mightily.

Finally he could stand still no longer, but drifted along the walk, not looking at all at the two Italians, but hoping to overhear something as he passed that might give him a clue to their topic of conversation.

As he did not look at the maid and Sylvester, Patsy had to look at other people. Right beside the row of barrels outside the grocer's door, and in the sun, sat a shock-headed, shabbily dressed individual, elbows on patched knees, his hands hanging, and his head nodding on his breast as though he were more than half asleep. He was almost within arm's reach of the skirt of Maria Deculto's dress, but appeared to give neither the woman nor her companion the first attention. He looked, indeed, like a veritable "old soak"—a disgraceful derelict of humanity.

But as Patsy continued to stroll nearer his attention was recalled again and again to this scarecrow figure. Suddenly he saw that the fingers on the man's right hand were crossed—were arranged—in a peculiar way. He looked sharply again and realized that the attitude of the hand and fingers formed a private code signal known only to Nick Carter and his assistants!

Whether this were Nick himself, or Chickering, Patsy did not know; but of one thing he was sure: Whichever it was he was near enough to overhear every word the two Italians spoke, and Patsy walked on with a greatly relieved mind. He did not turn around till he had walked half a block, and then he waited until Maria and Sylvester separated before he strolled back.

The woman evidently started to catch an uptown car, and the Italian dived into the cellar again. The half drunken man on the box in the sun did not move, and again Patsy made his slow way toward him. He stopped directly before the loafer and stared across the street all through the interview which followed. Nobody could have seen Patsy's lips move when he spoke, and the voices of both detectives were so well modulated that a person ten feet away would scarcely have heard the murmur of them.

"Who is it?" Patsy had asked at first.

"It's Nick. I must be well done, Patsy."

"I wonder the cop doesn't pull you, you look so near the real thing," observed Garvan.

"He might, only he's next. I put him onto my game before I perched here."

"Well?" queried Patsy. "What's the orders?"

"That was the Ridler's maid, of course?"

"Sure."

"Sylvester is her brother," said Nick. "She was giving him a raking over the coals for not playing the gigs she gave him the other day. One of the numbers made a killing."

"She is a policy fiend, then?"

"Sure."

"Why didn't 'Brudda Sylvest' play the gigs then?" queried Patsy.

"He lost 'em."

"And I found them!" cried Patsy, under his breath.

"I reckon you did, Patsy. That was how the slip come in Uncle Jerry's shop. It was this little Italian who dropped it, not Joe McNally."

"Sure?"

"Perfectly. They coolly discussed the robbery. Sylvester went into the house with some coal, broke open the kitchen door of Uncle Jerry's flat after he delivered the coal, knocked the old fellow out, stole his money and the doll, and got out without being seen. He brought the doll away in the coal sack. He seems proud of his bit of work."

"I'd like to get a few cracks at him for the whack he gave Uncle Jerry!" muttered Patsy.

"Well, there's likely to be something more important soon. I don't know what Sylvester did with the diamonds; but they haven't disposed of them yet."

"No?"

"The woman is crazy to raise money on them at once. And the boy is completely under her thumb. She certainly is mad on gambling, Patsy. She believes she will have a run of luck now, because one of her numbers had it been played day before yesterday, would have brought her twenty dollars.

"I don't believe either of them realize what the diamonds are worth. They have no appreciation of the value of such stones. As long as she has been with Mrs. Ridler, she knows little about jewels. She wants the boy to try and sell the necklace so that they can get money to gamble with and be rich!"

"She's crazy!" ejaculated Patsy.

"She is ignorant, all right. Perhaps she thinks those stones are only imitation," said Nick. Many ladies often wear paste replicas of their valuable jewels and keep the real articles locked up. Because the Ridlers have kept so quiet about this robbery, she may think that this is a similar case."

"I see."

"I did not hear every word they said," said Nick, "but Sylvester is going to see somebody whom he knows in the neighborhood who may help them dispose of the necklace. Or, so they think. Now, Pop-eye told me this morning when I saw him, that Sylvester went very early and swept out a billiard room on Second Avenue. That's Dawley's—the joint that Joe McNally goes to. It's the place that all the policy players in the neighborhood frequent.

"You know this Dawley, and from what you say about him," continued Nick, "I believe he wouldn't be above playing the 'fence' in a big thing like this. If this dago, who doesn't know the value of the stones, ever shows that Dawley the diamond necklace, the fellow is sure to see a chance to make a mint of money."

"He sure will, Nick," murmured Patsy. "Dawley will bite."

"I think so, myself. And if he does, we may be able to catch Dawley in the net, too. That would be a blow at policy, sure enough, for I understand that Dawley is one of Dennis Haloran's chief agents."

"That's what he is."

"Now," said Nick hurriedly, "Danny is trailing Joe McNally—just for luck. You may see the boy hanging around Dawley's. He'll be ready to help us if there is any trouble. You go over there and invest a little money. Keep a lookout for Sylvester, and if he comes into the joint, or communicates with Dawley, be sure I shall be in the neighborhood.

"But first," concluded Nick, "telephone Joseph and have him rouse out Chickering. Let Chick be waiting at the Ridler house when Maria Deculto arrives there, and tell Chick to arrest the woman and take her to the police station and keep her incommunicado till he hears from me."

"All right, chief," muttered Patsy, and after a few moments he strolled away from the vicinity of the apparently drunken man on the box in the sun.

CHAPTER X.

THE ROUND-UP.

The usual crowd was just beginning to gather at Dawley's when Patsy, after telephoning, arrived at the billiard cellar. The ruddy-faced, genial proprietor was on deck, and he remembered Patsy. The

latter looked prosperous, and Dawley liked to see prosperous people come into his place. They had more money to spend.

Patsy put a small sum down on a certain "gig" that he knew to be popular, and Dawley took him one side:

"How about that Joe McNally?" he asked the young detective hoarsely. "I see you don't speak to him," and Dawley nodded to a lanky, shabbily dressed young fellow, with a little black mustache and not much room between his eyes, who lounged in a chair on the other side of the room. "Did he play your friends for suckers?"

"No. They were mistaken on that point. And McNally don't know me from the ace of spades."

"Ah! I'm glad Joe isn't fishy. He hangs about here a good deal."

"Well, I guess he ain't so rotten," said Patsy.

"By the way, d'ye want to put a small bet down on a good thing in to-day's race? I got a good tip, and I'm going to play it strong myself. A friend of mine that makes a hand-book will be in by and by. Wait around and I'll introduce you."

"All right, I will," said Patsy, glad to have such an excuse for staying "on the job."

"Will you take a cue?" asked Dawley, delighted to fall in with such an "easy mark."

"Does Joe play pool?" suggested Patsy. "I'll take a cue with him if he does."

"Sure!" cried the proprietor. "McNally! come over here. Let me introduce you to Mister——?"

"Garvan," said Patsy.

"Mr. Garvan. Mr. McNally, Mr. Garvan. Play Mr. Garvan a game or two of pool, will you, Joe? Mr. Garvan will pay for it," said the proprietor briskly, and walked away.

McNally was evidently too lazy and lackadaisical to ever make good in any game that called for expertness. But he managed to knock the balls about, and it filled in the time for Patsy while he waited. Once Patsy saw Danny pass the billiard saloon, so knew that the chauffeur was on the watch. But it was an hour before Sylvester appeared at the place.

When he came slouching into the cellar Dawley hailed him in evident surprise.

"What you doing over here this time of day, Sylvest'?" he asked. "What's gone wrong with you?"

Sylvester said something in a low tone and nodded toward the rear of the basement where there was a small, partitioned office. What he said seemed to arouse Dawley's curiosity, and the man went back to the office with the fellow.

Sylvester whispered something to Dawley before they entered the office, and the man looked all about the room suspiciously.

"Come in here and tell me what you mean, Sylvest'," Patsy heard him say.

They disappeared. Almost at once several people entered the front door of the billiard saloon. Patsy recognized in the lead a couple of plain clothes men from the Central Office, and behind them was Nick—minus his disguise now—Danny, and even Pop-eye slipped in at the door and took up a place of observation. With the men already in the place, these additions made quite a goodly crowd.

Nick came quietly along to Patsy and spoke to him.

"The boy is here?"

"Yes," said Patsy, and in second thought, nodded to the staring McNally and said: "This is Joe McNally, Nick."

"So I see," said the detective, eyeing the ne'er-do-well with disfavor. "Perhaps you don't know, my man, how close you came to being jugged for a crime that you didn't commit, all because you did commit a misdemeanor. If you are a wise youth, you'll take this lesson to heart."

McNally's eyes stuck out almost as far as Pop-eye's, and he had not a word to say as Nick stepped quickly by and, followed by Patsy, approached the office, inside of which Dawley had turned on the electric light. The detectives sifted through the crowd standing in various parts of the room, so that they could easily control the gang if trouble arose. But so quickly and quietly did Nick get to the office that nobody not in the game noticed him.

The door had not been locked. Nick turned the knob noiselessly and drew it open a crack. He and Patsy could see Sylvester, whose back was toward the door, and Dawley who, although he faced them, was so taken up with what lay before him on his desk that he did not raise his eyes to see the auditors.

There, blazing like a heap of fire under the electric light, was Mrs. Ridler's diamond necklace!

"Good heavens, Sylvester! where'd you get it?" gasped Dawley.

"It is wort' much—eh?" queried the Italian youth, aroused to this fact by Dawley's involuntary exclamation.

"Why, it's very pretty," said Dawley, recovering himself. "But, of course, it is just a lot of paste stones."

"Are you sure, sign—?"

"Yep. Where'd you get it?"

"I finda heem," declared Sylvester unblushingly. "You buy—heh?"

"Me!" exclaimed Dawley, jumping. "Why I——"

He was within an ace of declaring that he could not afford such a necklace. Then he realized that Sylvester had no idea of its real value.

"Why, I don't know that I want it," he said hoarsely. "My wife's got a lot of such truck now."

"You buy heem," said Sylvester, nodding. "How much?"

"Want me to make you an offer?"

"Yes. You maka da price. I sella da jewels."

"At any old price, eh?" queried Dawley, with rather a shaky laugh.

It was in his power to get a necklace worth thousands for a few dollars. He saw that. But he knew that the stones were real, that they were worth a fortune, and that he was flirting with trouble to touch them. Yet the chance was too great to miss!

"I'll give you fifty dollars, Sylvest'," he said hesitatingly.

The Italian's black eyes snapped, and he shook his head emphatically.

"No, no!" he cried. "A hundred, signor."

"I'll make it seventy-five," said Dawley, beginning to bargain.

"No, no, signor," said Sylvester again, beginning to gather up the flashing gems. "A hundred—yes!"

Dawley could not stand to see them disappear into the Italian's ragged pocket.

"Well, I take them!" he exclaimed. "Here! give them over. I'll give you the money—in small bills, eh? You don't want it in one bill?"

"Money—a hundred dollars," exclaimed Sylvester, breathlessly watching Dawley as the man counted out the pile of banknotes.

Both were so absorbed that they did not see the door open slowly and Nick and Patsy watching the exchange. When the Italian had pocketed the money and Dawley had slipped the necklace into his own pocket, Nick's voice rang sharply through the room:

"Ready, boys! You take the dago, Patsy——"

Sylvester sprang up and a stiletto flashed into view before Nick's sentence was finished. But Patsy had expected this, and his first blow knocked the knife out of the boy's hand, and the second blow laid Sylvester insensible under the desk.

Dawley was too frightened to make an attempt at flight or escape. Nick twisted his hands behind him and strapped the banknotes on so as to keep him from disposing of the necklace before he was searched at the police station. The plain clothes men and Danny found a barrier between the captured scoundrels and the excited and angry crowd of habitues of the place.

"You guys beat it!" commanded one of the Central Office detectives. "And be glad we don't call the wagon and take you all around to the station. Let 'em pass out, Leary," he called to the uniformed officer who had appeared in response to Pop-eye's signal at the door.

Dawley began to sputter and threaten all manner of punishment for the police officers who had taken part in this raid, but Nick shut him up with:

"I wouldn't talk, if I were you, Dawley. You're only adding evidence to what is already against you. We are not pulling you for running a common gambling resort—although that is what this place is—but your friends higher up can't save you from the charge of buying stolen goods. You'll have hard work to clear your skirts of that. Come along!"

"And we've got this dago with the goods, too," said Patsy, who had yanked the half stunned Sylvester to his feet.

"Rather. We took the time as we came along," said Nick, "to go through that cellar of Tony Bollaro's, and in the corner where this boy sleeps I found little Nealie Ridler's doll hidden under a pile of rags. The evidence is conclusive. Sylvester and his sister will go up for this robbery, Sylvester will have the additional charge of assaulting Jerry Mellen preferred against him, and this fellow," added Nick, giving Dawley a little shake as they started for the door, "is due to get something handsome for his part in the transaction.

"It will break up this policy joint at least, I reckon," added Nick Carter, "and if Dawley gets behind the bars, it will be something of a blow to the game here on the East Side. I only wish he was Haloran himself. But I'll get the Policy King some day, Patsy—you mark my word!"

THE END.

The great detective is not done with the Ridler jewel theft, although he has drawn the lines pretty close about the perpetrators of that strange robbery and the man who tried to profit largely by it. Nor is he done with the Policy King whose hidden hand has been busy in the plot. This will be shown in a very interesting way in the next number (——). The story is, "The Policy King Baffled; or, Nick Carter's Dazzling Move." You'd better make sure of getting it if you don't want to miss an unusually good thing.

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A FAIR COWBOY'S HEROISM.

THE sun beat down fierce and hot upon the Dakota prairies, and imparted the temperature of a bake-oven to the endless red road, where the shuffling hoofs of the cattle raised a smothering cloud of dust.

Riding beside the "bunch" on a wiry little buckskin cow pony, galloped a girl of fifteen in a short cloth skirt, high leather shoes, and a loose flannel blouse. Her short, wavy brown hair blew loose and free beneath the shadow of a broad-brimmed felt hat.

She sang as she rode in and out along the wavering, snorting line, cracking her long whip and shouting, "Hi! Hoy! ... la!" as she drove a straying steer or a wandering calf back into the ranks.

Before the cattle, and upon their other side, rode a cowboy in his wide sombrero and leather "chaps," and behind the bunch a woman rode slowly, her tall, straight figure severely outlined by a black dress, and her face shaded by a broad-leafed Mexican straw hat.

It was past noon, sultry and still, and the cattle plodded quietly along the road with drooping heads.

"Ride up a little, Billy," called the girl, in a high, clear voice, "and let's get out of this dust! They'll go quietly enough now, and mother is behind to drive."

Touching her pony with the whip, she galloped on to the head of the column, and fell in beside the cowboy, who, with one leg over the horn of his saddle and his hat on his knee, was pacing along before the herd, singing lustily.

"Hot, isn't it, Billy?"

"You bet it is! I'll be glad when we git to some shade; and," looking back at the animals that plodded along wearily behind him, "them pore critters will, too. They ain't had no water sence yist'day, and I reckon them steers is plumb dry."

"I suppose they are, poor things. It seems kind of cruel to drive 'em on a day like this, but this bunch had to be got to the ranch. It won't be long now before we get to the river. There's the bluffs over yonder."

They both gazed ahead to where a high bluff humped up before them, its red sides broken with outcropping rocks and variegated with green patches of weeds and clumps of ... bushes.

... they approached it, the broad prairie road wound close to the edge of the bluff, while the land at the other side of the road gradually dwindled away until there was only the width of a narrow wagon road between the high walls that rose up above their heads and the steep bank that fell sharply away into the river twenty feet below.

The shade thrown by the high bank was grateful after the ride along the broiling road, and the cattle threw up their heads and sniffed noisily, while the cow ponies fell in side by side, and the girl lifted her hat from her damp hair with a blissful sigh.

"Isn't it cool and lovely here?" she murmured, gazing up at the steep bluff and out over the shining river. "I wish this trail went all the way home."

The cowboy, who had been looking back over his shoulder uneasily, turned in his saddle, and said bluntly:

"Well, I don't. Not by a jugful."

"Why not? Don't you think this is a pretty road?"

"I'm-m, waal, it's pretty enough, I guess, but it ain't any good to drive a bunch of thirsty cattle over, I'll tell you that."

Both riders turned in their saddles and looked back.

"Oh, they're all right, Billy," said the girl easily. "See, they're coming along as peaceably as can be."

Behind them the cattle ambled along quietly, and through the still, sultry air the voice of the woman came to them in the soothing, crooning, long-drawn "Yo-hee, yo-hee, yo-o-ho-hee!" which the cattle love.

Billy jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Yer mother knows what the danger is," he said quietly. "Harken at her? She's a-singing to 'em back there for to keep 'em quiet an' steady."

The girl turned her head, and a soft brightness shone in her wide, frank gray eyes. "Yes, she knows—mother does," she said softly. "She knows most everything. Poor mother!"

The cowboy glanced at the sun-browned face and wistful eyes, and hastily changed the subject.

"You shure can ride some, Miss Jess," he said irrelevantly. "I seen you yist'day over to the round-up. How come a leetle gal like you to know so much about ridin', an' cattle, an' sich-like?"

"Mother taught me," answered the girl simply. "When—after—father died there wasn't any man or boy about the ranch to do things for us, and so mother and I had to do all the work ourselves. I learned to ride then, so's to be mother's boy."

The cowboy looked at her dumbly, while a gentle light dawned in his hard, keen eyes, and a slight flush crept up through the brown of his lean cheeks.

"Well, mother's got a first-rate kind of a boy, all right," he said presently; and then, as if fearing that he had already said too much on a tender subject, he burst into a loud roar of song, and caroled and yodeled as if trying to turn the girl's thought into more cheerful mood.

Suddenly, in the midst of a rollicking cowboy ditty, the girl gave a startled cry and looked back. "Billy!" she screamed. "Billy! Hush! Look! Look! The cattle—the cattle are coming!"

With the song frozen on his lips, the cowboy gave one swift backward glance, leaped square in his saddle, and wheeled his pony into the road beside the girl.

"They're stampeded, by thunder!" he muttered between set teeth. "I was feared it might happen! The river—the river—ride, girl! Ride for all you're worth! We can't never turn 'em here! Our only chance is to get out of here! Ride!"

With blanched face and widely distended eyes, the girl gripped her bridle rein and looked back.

Down the narrow trail behind her thundered a wild, dark, packed mass of crowding bodies and madly tossing horns, as along the road between the bluff and the steep embankment the stampeded cattle, with lowered heads, blind and mad with thirst and fury, came plunging on.

Digging her spurs into her pony, she waited for no sec-

ond glance at the death which thundered so close behind her, but, followed by the cowboy, plied whip and spur, as she galloped for life along the narrow trail.

"Ain't there a turn up here in the road somewhere?" shouted the cowboy, as with strained muscles they plunged on, urging the terrified ponies to their utmost. "Ain't there somewheres we could turn out, so's to get a chanst to turn 'em or mill 'em? We can't hold out long this-a-way! Hurry, Jess! Faster, faster, girl! Give him the gad! Can't you make that old pony go no faster? They're a-gainin' on us every minute!"

The girl, sitting straight and square in her saddle, with her lips set firm and white, and her quick, keen gray eyes glancing now behind her, now in front along the curving, narrow trail, shook her head.

She had been over this road many times before, and knew there was no turn in the road, no widening of the trail for more than a mile ahead, and before they could reach that——

The thunder of hoofs came closer, the snorts and bellowings of the maddened beasts were in her ears. With shuddering heart she glanced back.

As far as she could see along the trail behind her came the black wave of tossing horns and lunging forms, coming every second nearer and nearer, bringing a death the horrors of which this prairie girl knew all too well.

Setting her teeth hard, she gathered her reins firmly in her hand and bent to the neck of her pony.

"We've got to do it, Buck!" she almost sobbed in his ear. "We've got to risk it, boy! It may be our last jump, but there's nothing else for us to do!"

Then, as the foremost of the cattle rose as a breaking wave behind her, she screamed, "Jump, Billy, jump! It's our last chance!" And, giving the buckskin a cut of the whip, she plunged over the embankment and sank like a stone beneath the rushing, yellow waters of the river.

At the same moment the leading steers, unable in their mad speed to see or heed the turn in the road, plunged after her over the embankment, in a huddled, plunging, struggling mass of hoofs and horns.

The cowboy, caught on the brink of the bluff by the wild rush of the cattle, had no choice but to leap into the river with them or be ground to atoms beneath their trampling hoofs.

The chances of life were small, anyway, and with something like a prayer on his lips he shouted to his horse, and went over the embankment into the river in the midst of a struggling host of horns, and hoofs, and tumbling carcasses.

The girl struck the water a moment ahead of the avalanche of living creatures from above, and came up gasping and panting, but in fair swimming water. With a cry she urged her pony on with whip and spur, and struck out into the middle of the channel in time to avoid being crushed to death or drowned by the frantic struggles of the cattle.

Glancing continually behind her as the brave little buckskin breasted the current, she saw Billy Callahan's red head bob up from beneath the waves, and breathed a thanksgiving as she saw his powerful horse strike out for clear water.

As Billy came to the surface he looked about him, and then began to shout with all the power fright and water had left in his lungs.

"Hi, there!" he yelled. "Hi, where you goin', girl? Why don't you make for the shore? What you doin'? Air ye crazy? What ye——"

"I can't go and leave those cattle!" shouted Jess. "Do you think I'm going to save myself and let those cattle drown? O Billy, help me, help me to save them! They—they're all we've got, and m-mother—mother has worked so hard to get them together. I—I could never look her in the face again if I let them drown! She trusted them to me. I'll save them if I drown myself trying!"

Regardless of buffeting horns and plunging hoofs, she swam her little pony in among the struggling mass, and began to drive the cattle apart, shouting meanwhile the "Hi, hey, whoop-la!" which was as familiar music to their terrified ears.

With a look of mingled admiration and astonishment on his face, Billy Callahan gave a mighty answering shout, and, putting his horse into the current, swam in among the cattle. He called to the girl to keep well out from the shore and away from the quicksands, and, adding his familiar whistle and whoop as he circled in and out among the bewildered animals, herded and drove them on one side while the girl "held the bunch" on the other. So they guided the swimming cattle downstream with the current, until at last they reached a shelving bank, where they were able to drive the now thoroughly meek and subdued creatures out of the water and back to the road.

As the ponies came out of the river, with their riders safe but dripping on their backs, the girl turned in her saddle and sent a joyous "Whoop-ee!" ringing over the prairies.

"Were safe, mother!" she shouted. "Safe and sound, and we never lost a steer!"

And Billy Callahan, wiping his dripping face upon his dripping sleeve, echoed, with a grin, "Never lost a steer! She saved 'em all, she did, and there ain't another girl in all Dakota could have done it!"

CAUGHT BY THE SHIP SWALLOWER.

STRETCHING from Ramsgate, England, on the north almost to St. Margaret's Bay on the south lie the Goodwin Sands, whereon thousands of vessels of all sizes and nationalities have met their doom.

"The shippe-swallower," Boethius, the old chronicler, styled this dread danger spot, and the reputation has clung to it ever since. The name was apt indeed, for no other sand bank has such a record of shipwrecks and fatalities. As one writer has said, the Goodwins "may well say to any other shoal or headland in the world:

"'For ae man that ye droon
I droon twa.'"

Woe to the vessel which, fog-driven or failing to notice the warnings sounded by lightship or buoy posted round its edges, blunders upon the "swallower." Rarely does one escape from its greedy maw. As the giant rollers hurl themselves upon their helpless prey, the shifting sands suck her farther and deeper in, until with her back broken the end speedily comes.

Of the force of these rollers one may gain some idea from the story of the full-rigged ship, the *Ganges*, which met her fate on the sands some years back. The Deal lifeboat, called out by her signals of distress, followed her almost right across the sands, while the breakers lifted the great vessel like a cockleshell, and bumped her from ridge to ridge, until she hovered on the outer steep edge of the Goodwins.

In the tale of the *Ganges* we have both the dark and the bright side of the picture presented to us. The terrors of shipwreck are relieved by the splendid heroism of the lifeboat men. Fortunately for those who "go down to the sea in ships" there are lifeboat stations all along the coast fronting the Goodwins, at Ramsgate, Broadstairs, Deal, Walmer, and Kingsdown, and the record of service rendered by these may well fill our hearts with pride. And fierce and bitter, indeed, is the battle that must be waged when the Goodwins have seized a ship in their clutches. Take the case of the *Providentia*, for instance, one of the many that might be cited by way of illustration.

On a wild December night, when the terror of fog was added to the fierce sea that was running, word was brought to the harbor master at Ramsgate that a large ship had struck on the sands.

Away, therefore, went the lifeboat, towed out by the little steam tug, the *Aid*. It was black as pitch, but as the crew neared the sands they distinguished among the white foam of the breakers the dark mass of the wreck, stern on, her bows pointing to the sea. Masts and rigging had been almost entirely swept away, and so far as could be seen no living soul remained on board.

The lifeboat, having parted from the *Aid*, pulled under the ship's stern, and now discovered some men and a boy crouched by the mainmast. The shipwrecked sailors were busy over something, for they at first paid no attention to the hail of the Ramsgate men. What this something was evidenced itself a minute or two later when one of the crew stood up and flung a line with a life buoy attached into the sea. Fully expecting that an attempt at rescue would be made, they had set about preparing a means of establishing communication with the lifeboat when it came.

To the joy of those on the wreck the line was secured, but pull as they might the lifeboat men could not haul themselves nearer in. The outrunning tide and the strength of the gale blowing resisted all their united efforts. At this juncture the captain, becoming desperate, threw himself onto the line, and began to battle his way to his rescuers through the boiling water.

It was a bold attempt, and those who watched him held their breath for a moment. Then, in a flash, he disappeared from sight, beaten from his hold by the force of the waves.

Not one man in a hundred, said the lifeboat men, could have lived in that sea, and they were fully astonished to behold the captain swimming toward them. But, strong man though he was, he could make no headway, and the life buoy thrown to him from the boat only reached him in time. The last they saw of him was a black head bobbing up and down in the water as the tide carried him swiftly out to sea.

After the captain the mate. But he fared even worse, for he could not make way against the waves, and was forced to swim back to the wreck. In a last desperate effort he strove to clamber up a hanging rope; then, his strength giving out, he sank back into the caldron of water, and was swept away.

Of those whom the lifeboat had first sighted only two now remained, a man and a boy. Not daunted by his officers' fate, the sailor next essayed the perilous passage of the life line. After a terrible struggle, during which it seemed several times as though he had been drawn under, he reached the lifeboat, and hands were stretched out to haul him into safety. At this last moment, however, he was seen to collapse, and to the horror of the others he began to slip back into the water.

But help was at hand. With a shout to his mates to hold him, the bowman of the lifeboat flung himself across the raised foredeck of the boat, all slippery with the spume of the breakers, and hung there, head downward, while his hands groped for a clutch at the drowning sailor. His plucky effort succeeded. In the nick of time he gripped him by the collar. Then, as the bow plunged up and down, now high in the air and now buried under the water, the grim struggle went on, until at length rescuer and rescued were slowly dragged into the shelter of the boat.

By this time the heavy seas sweeping over the doomed ship—the *Providentia*, from Finland, as her sternpost proclaimed—had done their work. She began to break up, and when a huge wave washed over her hull and broke on the mainmast where the boy had last been seen, the cry went up that he was lost. Then a moment later another cry rang out, for there, tossing among the waves, was a black speck which presently drifted close enough to the boat to be hooked and drawn up. It was the poor little lad, well-nigh drowned in his buffeting by the rollers, but not so far gone, fortunately, that he could not be brought round eventually.

Their work accomplished, the brave lifeboat men now hoisted sail for the harbor, and here comes in what is perhaps the strangest part of this thrilling tale of rescue. On the way homeward a dark object was seen floating ahead, and when the boat drew closer the crew were astounded to see that it was the captain of the *Providentia*, still with his life buoy round him and still, thank God! alive!

It is a common saying at sea that you cannot drown a Finn, and, indeed, this remarkable experience would seem to bear out its truth.

WHALES IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC.

The skipper of a steamer that plies between New York and West Indian ports announced on his return from a recent voyage that the waters between those two ports, and especially in the vicinity of the islands, are full of whales. He says he never saw so many in his life as he has been seeing last fall. He ran through several schools of them on the latest trip, while a sister ship recently reported passing through about a hundred.

This announcement raises an interesting question. Has the development of the petroleum industry and the electric-lighting business put whale oil at such a low price that there is little incentive for the capture of the great cetacean? There was a time when whales were hunted so industriously that they virtually disappeared from the North Atlantic, and whalers were forced to go to the Pacific and to the waters north of the Scandinavian peninsula for them. According to the skipper's view, there are enough big spouters in close reach of New York to supply the American market.

Perhaps the good old days of the harpoon and the blubber kettle will return. Now the whaling industry is almost a matter of history. Whales are caught by methods very different from those that were in vogue when New Bedford was one of the most important shipping points in the new world. Possibly there is an opportunity for ingenious inventors to apply twentieth-century processes to the whale hunt in the North Atlantic. At all events, so long as whales are as numerous as now described it is impossible for any one to corner oil absolutely.

ON THE NIGHT EXPRESS.

It was the night express to the north, in England, and young Smifkins, arriving with only a minute to spare, found that every compartment was full—or nearly full—with one exception. The exception was a compartment containing only one passenger, a savage-looking old gentleman, who declared that all the other seats were taken. It certainly seemed so, the travelers being represented by various items of luggage carefully placed on the seats. But Smifkins didn't believe the old fellow, and determined to stop there.

"They'll be back in a few moments," said the old gentleman, as Smifkins cleared a hat box from a corner seat and prepared to make himself comfortable.

No other passenger arrived, however, and presently the train moved off, with only Smifkins and the old gentleman in that particular compartment.

"I'm sorry your friend has lost his train," said Smifkins, "but I'm hanged if he shall lose his luggage."

Saying which, he dropped the hat box out of the window onto the tail end of the platform, and the old gentleman wept.

HE HAD THE PROOF.

Harry was not feeling well and his father suggested that he might be sickening from chicken-pox, then prevalent. Harry went to bed laughing at the idea, but early next morning he came downstairs looking very serious, and said:

"You're right, father; it is the chicken-pox; I found a feather in the bed!"

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